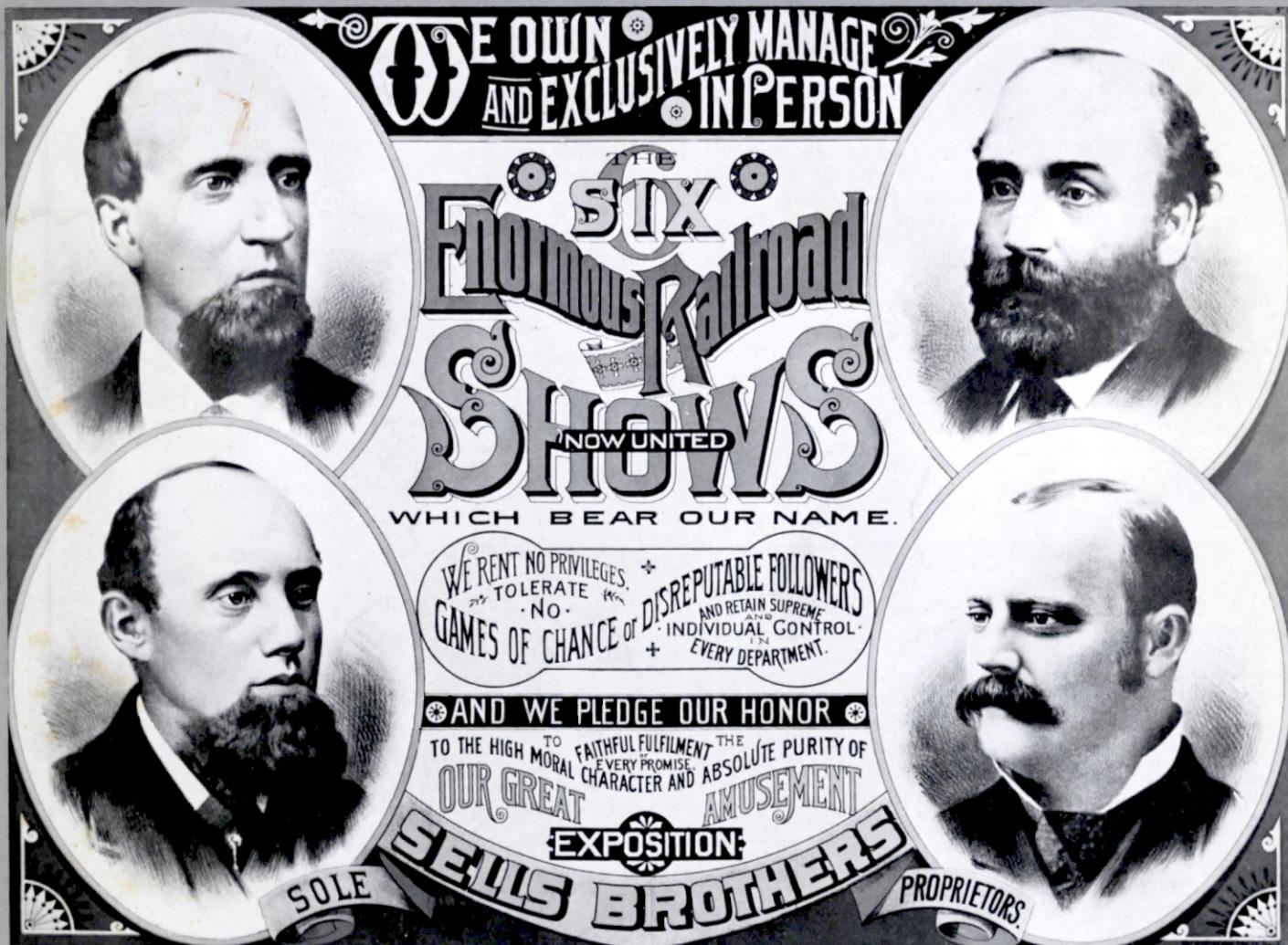


Bandwagon

THE JOURNAL OF THE CIRCUS HISTORICAL SOCIETY



SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER 1980

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THE FRED BUCHANAN RAILROAD CIRCUSES 1923-31

Robbins Bros. Circus

Part III — The 1925 Season

by Joseph T. Bradbury

When 1925 arrived Fred Buchanan had his Robbins Bros. Circus in quarters at his farm near Granger, Iowa. The previous season had been most successful and activity in the quarters' shops would soon begin to ready the show for its 1925 tour, the third since Buchanan returned as a circus owner in 1923.

First news of the show in the trade publications came in the form of an advertisement in the Jan. 17, 1925 *Billboard* which read as follows.

"ROBBINS BROS. BIG 4 RING CIRCUS Wants 20 clowns. State if you play in clown band. Cook House and accommodations. Nothing better in show business. Address Kenneth R. Waite, Producing Clown. Coates House, Kansas City, Mo."

The following week's *Billboard* advised that Robbins Bros. was scheduled to begin the new season on April 25. The article said that preparations are now going on in full blast at the Granger quarters. Bert Rickman would be in charge of the performance which would include two big spectacles and a number of feature acts. Kenneth Waite would be producing clown and the various department bosses will be essentially the same as last season. It was noted that several wagons were under construction and additional flat car space might be required for them. It was planned that the show would carry 12 elephants, although 3 of them coming from William P. Hall would not arrive until April. Additions to the menagerie have been extensive with a number of cat animals, 3 ostriches, and 2 kangaroos arriving and placed under the care of John Schultz, head animal man. New steel railway cars being constructed by the Mt. Vernon Car Mfg. Co. were to be delivered about the middle of March but no further details as to number or type were given. A most interesting item in the article said that the paint shop had turned out the following tableau wagons—the United States, Great Britain, Belgium, China, France, and Panama, all to be used in the Parade of the Nations, and workmen were busy at present on the others. A new steam calliope is being constructed, the instrument being mounted on the old Forepaugh bandwagon. The carvings on this wagon, a beautiful piece of work, are 18 inches deep. The show's baggage wagons are being worked on under the

supervision of Earl Sinnott. C.J. McCarthy is in charge of the paint shop with 7 assistants, 5 men alone being employed in applying gold leaf to the parade wagons. This interesting report from the Granger quarters was sent by the show's secretary James Morse.

The above mentioned *Billboard* article pinpoints the date of the construction of the Robbins steam calliope using the old Forepaugh Lion Chariot wagon which had been used as the No. 1 bandwagon in parade for the past two seasons. It may be recalled that the former Young Buffalo Wild West steam calliope wagon which had served on Buchanan's show in 1923 and 1924 was damaged in a railroad accident at Maquoketa, Iowa, May 12, 1924. It is believed that the sides of the calliope were damaged in the wreck but the wheels and chassis were not because when the new calliope wagon was reconstructed at Granger in the early months of 1925 the original calliope's chassis and wheels were retained and the sides from the Forepaugh Lion were removed and placed on them to form the steam calliope to be used in 1925. Richard E. Conover had this to say about this wagon in his book, *The Fielding Bandchariots*.

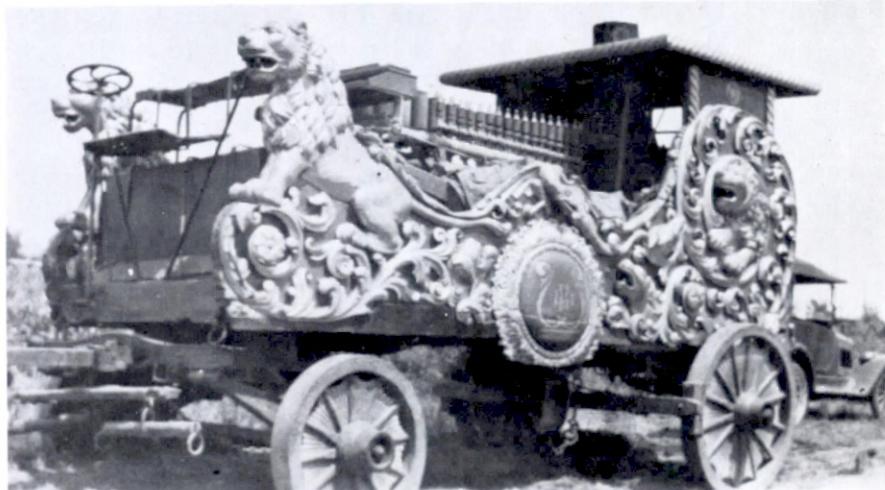
"About 1925 something must have happened to the Robbins Bros. calliope

body because it is evident that the sides of the old Forepaugh Lion chariot ended its useful days on Buchanan's calliope. By comparing such details as the wheels and chassis on all available photographs, it is apparent that it was the chariot sides and not the calliope components that were transferred."

The new Robbins Bros. steamer was a beautiful wagon and brought up the rear of the 1925 street parade, titled and heavily advertised as The Parade of the Nations. Also in the march was the former Yankee Robinson air calliope which had been in the 1924 parade and the eight so called Spellman set of tableau wagons which Buchanan had acquired from Robert F. Schiller during the 1924 season, GREAT BRITAIN, PANAMA, BELGIUM, UNITED STATES, FRANCE, CHINA, SOUTH AMERICA, and AFRICA (often called India or Hippo). The absence of a comprehensive set of 1925 parade photos make it difficult to say with certainty how each individual wagon was used. Belgium was used as the No. 1 bandwagon.

The Jan. 31, 1925 *Billboard* said that Fred (Peggy) Poole would again have his pit show on Robbins Bros. in 1925. Other notes advised that Harry Hall, baritone, was signed by Buchanan to sing the leading role in Bert Rickman's new spec, *The Arabian Nights*. Freddie

wagon were placed on the wheels and chassis of the Young Buffalo Steam Calliope which had been used by Buchanan in 1923 and 1924. Joe Bradbury Collection.



Freeman and wife will present a 7 people riding act and the 4 Riding Davenports will again be with the show. Ben Mohamed, last season on the show with the Ben Shirkey Troupe of Arabs, will present his own troupe of 9 Arabs in the 1925 performance. (Author's note—it appears Freddie Freeman did not have his own riding act but was a member of the Davenport troupe.)

Another article with interesting news from the Granger quarters appeared the following week in the Feb. 7, 1925 *Billboard*. This account said that Buchanan had purchased John Hickey's six high school and jumping horses which would be used in the big menage number and in the fox hunt. These horses had been a feature on the Walter L. Main Circus, owned by Andrew Downie, in 1924. Several other horses had been added to the high school number under direc-

Photo No. 1—Newspaper advertisement for Robbins Bros. stand at Black River Falls, Wis., June 29, 1925. Circus World Museum (Baraboo, Wis.) Photo.

Largest Circus in the World Giving a Street Parade Now Twice Its Former Size
Augmented by the Purchase of the Property of the United States Circus Corporation

ROBBINS BROS. BIG 4 RING WILD ANIMAL CIRCUS UNITED WITH PONCA BILL'S WILD WEST

Mammoth Pageant
Historic Review of America
Depicting the History of America, Presenting Indian Characters and Episodes of Paul Revere's Famous Ride, Spirit of '76, Washington, U.S. Grant, Major F. Lee, Abraham Lincoln, the Mexican War, Great War, Tableau Costumes and Parades of the Month

1 Rings, 2 Stages, Steel Arena, Wild West, Horse Show
Three Herds of Elephants | Parade of the Nations

10 Elephants | 500 PEOPLE
300 HORSES
600 EDUCATED ANIMALS
10 Acres of Tracts
Elephants and Lions
100 WILD ANIMALS
108 Wagons
Electric Light Plants
50 Funny Clowns

Ponca Bill and the World's Greatest Bucking Horse Riders, Including the Famous Lulu P. Parr, Ropers, Bulldoggers, Together with a Band of Fifty Sioux Indians, Presenting a Real Wild West

10 Performing Sea Lions 10
Performing African Lions, Tigers, Panthers and Pumas
Horseback Riding Leopard
10 Performing Polar Bears 10

TWO BIG SHOWS for the ONE PRICE OF ADMISSION
Will Postively Exhibit at

BLACK RIVER FALLS
MONDAY June 29



Photo No. 2—Robbins Bros. advertising car, Season of 1925. Photo by Ben J. Kubly.

tion of J.C. McCarthy. The article also said that Stick Davenport with his 8 horses were wintering at the State Fairgrounds in nearby Des Moines. It was noted that Davenport has a fine ring barn located there and three of his people are in training at the present time. Freddie Buchanan was scheduled to arrive March 1 and would join the Davenport family. The Davenports will use 5 people in one act and will furnish 3 lady principal acts for the big show. Further information said that most of the tableau wagons have been turned out of the paint shop and the two calliope have been sent for their new "spring clothes". The cages and dens will follow to the paint shop. A carload of seat lumber from Oregon arrived after being 45 days on the road and would soon be made into circus seats. General agent Ed Brennan was at the Granger farm last week reporting from his trip to the east. He says that section of the country is in very fine condition. Supt. Earl Sinnott is building a new wagon to house the five big generators the show will carry this season. Contracts were closed with Baker-Lockwood for the new big top, a 130 ft. round with three 50's. Final note said the menagerie would be enlarged this season and would have new animal dens and 6 more elephants than carried the previous year.

During the middle weeks of February news from Granger was rather scant, although it was reported in the trade publications that the Gallan Family of 5, Mexican acrobats and gymnasts, have been engaged for the coming season and Jean Evans Woodward, prima donna, would appear in the program. Ed L. Brannon

Photo No. 4—Robbins Bros. baggage wagons at the Granger, Iowa quarters in early months of 1925. Photo by Ben J. Kubly.



advised the *Billboard* that Robbins Bros. had signed an agreement with the International Alliance of Billposters and Billers for the 1925 season.

The Feb. 28, 1925 *Billboard* headlined an article that Robbins would open at Perry, Iowa on April 25 and that the Granger quarters were currently the scene of much activity. The show's second stand of the season had been set for Des Moines. The article said that with the completion of the new sealion den the last of the new parade wagons had left the shop. It was noted that the parade equipment had been completely changed from that which left Lancaster, Mo. a year ago. Not one of the former parade wagons would be used. The new tableaux and cages, together with the new steam calliope, are marvels of beauty. An interesting item was that Buchanan has sold to the new Frank J. Taylor Circus being framed at Omaha, Neb. two stock cars and a big top he had in reserve last season. Canvas to be used by Robbins Bros. this season is being made by the Baker-Lockwood Mfg. Co. and will be all new from cookhouse to big top. (Author's note—unfortunately, photographic coverage does not exist which would confirm or deny this.) Bert Emerson is working the new ring stock and doing nicely. The Davenports are at the State Fair Grounds where they are breaking new bareback stock. Stick Davenport now has 8 head of ring stock but will probably carry only 6 with the show. Bert Rickman promises a big surprise in the new wardrobe. Mrs. Rickman having designed it. The new steel cars are ready and expected before March 15. Two dozen monkeys arrived from Louis Ruhe last week and John Schultz, boss animal man, is looking after them. New seat lumber is being assembled. New blues are 18 high with reserves 14 high. Long side has 8 double sections. Shorty Murray with two assistants is building the new grandstand. Diamond, who has charge



Photo No. 5—France tableau wagon with clown band on top in Robbins Bros. parade at Sioux Falls, S.D., May 28, 1925. Pfening Collection.

of the carpenter shop, has been transferred to his favorite—canvas and tarps. George Johnson has the harness about ready and is working at this time on the spec. The new additions to the Robbins Bros. quarters are enjoyed by the help and the new cookhouse is one of the largest and best ever used in circus business. This building was completed this past summer. On the second floor is the dormitory which is outfitted with both tubs and showers for the boys. Colored employees are all quartered in the second story of the paint shop. Earl Sinnott, supt., is being complimented by visitors at the farm on his wonderful showing.

Another fine report from Robbins came in the March 14, 1925 *Billboard* where it was mentioned that Joe Lloyd, supt. of baggage stock, has returned to Granger quarters and says he will have 90 head of the best looking baggage stock in circus business. (Author's note—this figure is too high. Possibly 60 head would be more realistic.) At present there are 15 men in the baggage stock department. Buchanan has added 6 head of high jumpers to the ring stock group. George Johnson, veteran harness maker, completed his work with several sets of new harness and trap-

pings having been made. Earl Sinnott has turned out several beautiful parade wagons. Joe Lloyd and George Johnson will soon leave on a stock purchasing trip.

The following advertisement also appeared in this issue.

"Wanted—Principal Horses. Wanted to Buy—Good, true running principal horses. Wire or write, Fred Buchanan, Granger, Iowa."

With only a month to go before opening day the Robbins show was fast taking shape as per this report in the March 21, 1925 *Billboard*.

"The Parade of Nations will be a feature this season. Four new stock cars including a new car for elephants arrived at quarters from the Mt. Vernon Car Mfg. Co. and will be added to the train. A new coach has also arrived. One feature of the show will be A Parade of the Nations in which the principal countries of the world will be represented by floats and people. Wardrobe for the new spec, Mother Goose in Fairyland, is finished and the Historical Review material is ready for the first rehearsal which will take place at Perry, Iowa, April 22. Among new acts booked is the Matsumodo troupe of Japanese, 8 in number, which so far has not appeared in the United States. The act has been in Mexico and

Photo No. 8—Robbins Bros. billing stand at Glasgow, Mont., July 18, 1925. Circus World Museum (Baraboo, Wis.) Photo.



Photo No. 6—South America tableau with Indians on top in Robbins Bros. parade at Sioux Falls, S.D., May 28, 1925. Pfening Collection.

South America for three years. Other turns are Tiebor's sea lions; Freddie Freeman, comedy equestrian, Ben Mohammed Arabs; Flying Clarks, Four Riding Davenports, Robbins Bros. performing elephants, and Smiths, dogs, monkeys and Russian (jumping) Wolfhounds. The wild west section, under the personal direction of Ponca Bill, will include several celebrities, including Lula P. Parr, famous bucking horse rider."

In this article it is noted that the name of the opening spec produced by Bert Rickman was listed as Mother Goose in Fairyland instead of Arabian Nights as earlier announced. It appears that throughout the season these names will be interchanged in the trade publications reports. Newspaper ads used in 1925 mention the closing spec, Historic America, but fail to name the opening spectacle.

The official roster for Robbins Bros., Season of 1925, was published in late March and read as follows: Fred Buchanan, prop; James Morse, manager; Charles Meyers, asst. manager; Ira Watts, treasurer; John Schiller, auditor; E.L. Brannon, general agent; Dan Hoffman, local contractor; W.T. Buchanan, contracting press agent; Robert Saul, press agent back; Milton Robbins, manager, sideshow; Bert Rickman, equestrian director; Earl Sinnott, general supt.; C.W. Buchanan, supt., privileges; O.A. Gilson, musical director; Jack Croake, Supt., reserved seats; Jack King, supt., canvas; Charles (Swede) Nelson, trainmaster; Joe Lloyd, boss hostler; Wallie Champion, supt., lights; George Johnson, 24 hr agent; John Schultz, supt., animals; Fred May, blacksmith; Frank R. Ballenger, manager, advertising car No. 1.

One important addition to the roster came in early April when it was announced that C.H. (High Pockets) Baudendistel would have charge of the elephant herd. Also in early April the



Billboard reported that Freddie Freeman and wife had recently closed with the May Wirth Company at the Hippodrome in New York City and would soon join Robbins Bros. to be the feature riding comedian.

The official Call for the advance department came in the April 4, 1925 *Billboard* and read as follows.

"Call, Call, Call—Robbins Bros. Circus—All people for the advance report to Granger, Iowa, April 10. Car opens April 11. Please acknowledge this call by mail. Frank R. Ballenger, Car Manager; Ed L. Brannon, Gen. Agt., Granger, Iowa."

A few weeks before the season opener the Des Moines *Register* in a Sunday edition rotogravure section ran a full page display of some of the Robbins Bros. animals in their winter-quarters in Granger. The layout was very attractive.

The final report from Granger prior to the start of the 1925 season came in the April 18, 1925 *Billboard*. It was stated that rehearsals would start at Perry, Iowa, April 22, where the show will open on April 25. New seats, jacks, stringers, 16 wild animal dens (author's note—this would be too many separate cage wagons). Exact number of cages carried in 1925 has not been determined but was probably about 8 or 9), 6 baggage wagons, and a new calliope have been built at the Granger quarters. Owner Fred Buchanan has purchased a car for the elephants and 3 new stock cars, all steel from Mt. Vernon. He has also ordered 9 steel flat cars from the same company and a fine new privilege car has been added to the show train. Other notes said that the street parade would be extensively advertised this season as the Parade of the Nations, for which Mrs. Bert Rickman, assisted by her sister, Helen Kimball, and five women, have made some beautiful wardrobe. Equestrian director, Bert Rickman, will present a new spectacle, Fairyland, in which Jean Evans Woodward, prima donna, and Harry Hall, baritone will sing the principal roles. Ponca Bill, assisted by the Privett brothers, Mexican Jack, Texas Bill, Colorado Jack, Lulu P. Parr, and Lady Privett will present the Wild West performance. A tribe of 24 Sioux Indians with their squaws and papooses will be one of the big features. O.A. Gilson and his 22 piece All American Band will furnish music for the big show. Milton Robbins will again have the management of the sideshow and Fred (Peggy) Poole the pit show with Jesse Coleman as manager. Jack King is in charge of the big top, 130 ft. round with three 50's and using two sets of quarter poles. The writer of the article was identified as F. Robert Saul, who said he would be found on the front door of the show entertaining the newspaper men during the season.



Photo No. 9—Robbins Bros. billing stand at Aberdeen, S.D., June 6, 1925.
Photo by Ben J. Kubly.

As mentioned before in this series the absence of photos, train loading orders, and train movement orders make it very difficult for the author to paint a full and accurate picture of the physical appearance of the Buchanan rail show for a number of seasons covered in this series. An immediate problem is to determine with certainty the number and type of railroad cars in the 1925 Robbins Bros. train. During the early weeks of 1925 the *Billboard* has many references to a 25 car train, a 27 car train, and some years ago the late George Chindahl in an article on Buchanan quoted *Billboard* references putting the train in mid-season 1925 up to 30 cars. This was completely in error according to the best information we can find. The late William H. Woodcock, Sr., who was actually on Robbins Bros. in 1926 and quite familiar with the show during its other seasons, once told the author that in 1925 the show moved on 20 cars, the train consisting of 1 advance, 4 stocks, 9 flats, and 6 coaches. This was the same number and type of cars the show used during the latter part of the 1924 season. The several reports in the *Billboard* of Robbins getting four new stock cars, one of which was used for elephants,

Photo No. 12—Robbins Bros. lithos and date sheets in store front windows at Aberdeen, S.D., June 6, 1925. Circus World Museum (Baraboo, Wis.) Photo.

from Mt. Vernon prior to start of the 1925 season are believed to be correct. They were not "all steel" as often mentioned but were the typical Mt. Vernon built stocks with steel framing and wooden sides and tops which a number of other circuses in the early and mid 1920's purchased. Photos of the Robbins stock cars appeared in Mt. Vernon advertisements in the *Billboard* for several years. Mention was also made that Robbins had ordered Mt. Vernon built flat cars supposedly to be delivered in time for the 1925 season. Photos taken in later seasons definitely picture Mt. Vernon flats in the Robbins train but until 1925 train photos turn up we can only speculate if the flats were present that season. It appears that Buchanan during the first seasons following his return as a railroad show operator in 1923 would from time to time purchase and sell railroad cars without actually increasing the number of cars in the train. It may be recalled that in late 1924 he advertised for sale four stock cars and indeed we have evidence he did sell two stocks to the new Frank J. Taylor Circus in early 1925 and no doubt disposed of the others elsewhere. Likewise Buchanan was often purchasing additional coaches and no doubt disposing of others.

It will be noted there were several reports from the Granger quarters in the early spring of 1925 that Robbins Bros. would have a total of 12 elephants during the new season. The show did indeed have 12 later in the season but had only 9 at the start.





Photo No. 10—Robbins Bros. used this colorful billing daub to advertise the Historic America spec in 1925. Photo by Ben J. Kubly.

Chang Reynolds' files indicate that the 9 elephants present on opening day 1925 were COLUMBIA, ENA, TRILBY, TOMMY, DING, BOO, BIG KATIE, BIG JENNY, and LITTLE BABE. The first six had been on the show at the conclusion of the 1924 season and appearing on Robbins Bros. for the first time were BIG KATIE, BIG JENNY, and LITTLE BABE. Reynolds gives the following sketches on each of the newcomers.

"BIG KATIE"—She was in a shipment that came from the West Coast to the Hall farm in 1923. The shipment included Katie, Jenny, Babe, Trilby, Mary, Sidney, Albert, and Don. These were in charge of Bert McLain from the coast to Lancaster. Katie, Jenny, and Babe were broken as an act by Al Langdon. In 1925 W.H. Woodcock, Sr., took Tommy, Ding, Boo, Big Katie, Big Jenny, and Little Babe to Granger quarters to start the season. Woodcock said that Ena, Columbia, and Trilby were already at Granger that year. Big Katie was with Robbins Bros. through 1931, then to Hall Farm until she was sold to the Cole Bros. Circus in 1934. At that time she was with an act at the Chicago World's Fair. From 1934 until she died in the Rochester, Ind. quarters fire in 1940 she was with Cole Bros. She was estimated to be about 16 years old and weighed 4675 in 1937.

"BIG JENNY"—Came to Hall Farm in the shipment mentioned above. Was with Robbins Bros. through 1931, then Hall Farm, until 1934 when sold to Zack Terrell and Jess Adkins for their Cole Bros. Circus. On Cole Bros. through 1952 and then to Paul Kelly. She died on Kelly's farm, 9 September 1972. Estimated as 19 years old and weighed 4700 pounds in 1937.

"LITTLE BABE"—Came to Hall Farm in same shipment mentioned above. With Robbins Bros. through 1931, then Hall Farm, until sold to Adkins and Terrell's Cole Bros. Circus in 1934. Was with Cole Bros. through 1952 and then to Paul Kelly. Still with Kelly in 1970—

no news after that date. Estimated as 19 years old and 4750 pounds in 1937.

Later in the 1925 season Buchanan purchased three elephants from Snake King (details to be given later). These were MARGARET, BLANCHE, and TONY. This purchase gave Robbins Bros. a total of 12 in the herd. The Reynolds' files have the following sketches on the three coming from Snake King.

"MARGARET"—Sold to Robbins Bros. by Snake King in mid-season 1925. With Robbins through 1931, then Hall Farm until sold to Russell Bros. Circus in 1934. Actually Hall exchanged her for Virginia, an elephant he had sold to the Russell show in 1933. She was on Russell Bros. until 1945 when she went to Al G. Kelly-Miller Bros. Circus. I first saw her in the fall of 1941 when the Russell show came to Zoopark, Los Angeles to winter. Later I saw her many times on Kelly-Miller in the 1950's and 1960. She was on the Fairyland Circus (Obert Miller, owner) in 1963 and *The Bandwagon*, May-June 1969, reports her sold to Circo Union about 1968.

"BLANCHE"—Sold to Robbins Bros. by Snake King in mid-season 1925. With Robbins Bros. through 1931, then Hall Farm until sold in 1934 to Adkins and Terrell's Cole Bros. Circus. With Cole Bros. through 1952, then sold to Paul Kelly. She was at the Circus World Museum when it opened in the summer of 1959. In 1957 she was on Benson Bros. Circus with Bill Morris, owner. This was a beautiful elephant but did not perform—used only as a work elephant. Estimated age was 38 years and 9800 pounds in 1937.

"TONY"—Sold to Robbins Bros. by Snake King in mid-season 1925. With Robbins Bros. through 1931, then Hall Farm. Was sent with the act from Hall Farm to Chicago World's Fair in 1934, then sold later that year to Adkins and Terrell's Cole Bros. With Cole Bros until August 1944. She was a tough elephant and severely injured Willie Keller, attendant, at Newport News, Va. while loading in August 1944. She was executed because of that. Reported as 15 years old and 4570 pounds in 1937.

The full roster of 12 elephants on



Photo No. 11—Ben J. Kubly of the Robbins Bros. advertising car standing in front of large billing daub at Aberdeen, S.D., June 6, 1925. Circus World Museum (Baraboo, Wis.) Photo.

Robbins Bros. at the end of the 1925 season would be Columbia, Ena, Trilby, Tommy, Ding, Boo, Big Katie, Big Jenny, Little Babe, Margaret, Blanche, and Tony.

The 1925 circus season had now arrived. Business conditions overall in the nation were good. Each year's agricultural harvest of course depended on what the weather man would deliver during the growing season. The particular crop and growing area were prime factors in determining what the overall agricultural situation would be and circus general agents had to always keep up to date on this. Calvin Cooledge began his first full term as president in March after having filled the office since the death of President Harding in 1923. There was no government "aid" to help failing showmen but neither were there any restrictive government "regulations" to keep him from making and keeping a fast buck in those days. The mid 1920's for most showmen were good times. Railroad circuses going on the road in 1925 included Ringling-Barnum, 100 cars; Sells-Floto, 30 cars; Hagenbeck-Wallace, 30 cars; John Robinson, 30 cars; Al G. Barnes, 30 cars; Sparks, 20 cars; Christy Bros. 20 cars; Robbins Bros., 20 cars; Gentry-Patterson, 15 cars; Lee Bros., 15 cars; Walter L. Main, 10 cars; and Frank J. Taylor, 10 cars. All of these were flat car type shows. The new 40 car Miller Bros. 101 Ranch Wild West Show was a major newcomer to the outdoor entertainment field and competed directly with the circuses for the rube's spare change. Gilly or tunnel car rail circuses going out were E.H. Jones' two car Cooper Bros. and Chester Monahan's five car Gollmar Bros. In September Gollmar Bros. was converted to a 10 car flat car type circus.

Overland circuses, most of them travelling with a combination of trucks and horse drawn vehicles included Mighty Haag, Seils-Sterling,

Mighty Hooge, W.E. Morgan's Nickel Plate, Ketrow Bros., M.L. Clark & Sons, Orange Bros., Moon Bros., Sam Dock's Keystone State, Tom Atkinson's, Bud Anderson, Carl Bros., Leroy's Overland, Walker Bros., Fisher Bros., Clarion Bros., James B. O'Neil, and Rose Killian.

New rail shows for 1925 were Miller Bros. 101 Ranch Wild West, Floyd and Howard King's Walter L. Main, and Frank J. Taylor. Lee Bros. was a new title for the former Golden Bros. Missing in 1925 was the Andrew Downie version of the Walter L. Main show.

At the beginning of the season all railroad circuses presented a daily street parade with exception of Ringling-Barnum, Al. G. Barnes, and the three American Circus Corporation units, Sells-Floto, Hagenbeck-Wallace, and John Robinson. After a month into the season in order to combat the heavy competition from the 101 Ranch Wild West Show and its parade, the parade was restored on Sells-Floto, Hagenbeck-Wallace, and John Robinson. Many of the larger overland shows also presented a daily march.

The official title used in billing Buchanan's show was Robbins Bros. Big 4 Ring Wild Animal Circus united with Ponca Bill's Wild West Show. Photos indicate a varied and colorful line of billing paper was used, including sheets advertising the Historic America spec. The late Ben J. Kubly was a member of advertising car No. 1 and we are indebted to him for the number of excellent photographs especially of the billing he took that season.

Robbins Bros. moved out of the Granger quarters and on to Perry, Iowa where rehearsals began as scheduled on April 22. The official season opener was in Perry on April 25 and the 1925 season was under way. The show then moved to Des Moines for a two day stand, April 26-27.

Photo No. 13—Another view of Robbins Bros. lithos and date sheets in store front windows, Aberdeen, S.D., June 6, 1925, Circus World Museum (Baraboo, Wis.) Photo.



The May 2, 1925 *Billboard* recorded the opener with headlines, "ROBBINS CIRCUS HAS FINE OPENING. Big Business Recorded at Initial Stand, Perry, Ia. Excellent Parade and Performance. Two Specs." The article then read in part.

"Ideal circus weather and a big attendance marked the season's opening of Robbins Bros. at Perry, Iowa, proving that the former Perry jinx of rain and non-circus going public had been broken. The parade is magnificent, the performance splendid and everything moved in a clock-like manner. The reserved seat sale in Perry was discontinued before the matinee performance started, as people jammed and crowded every available inch of space, and business at night was capacity. Owner Fred Buchanan said that the opening was the best he ever had and estimated that it was a \$5,000 day.

"The Riding Davenports, featuring Freddie Freeman, comedian, is deservedly the headline number. The opening spec, Fairyland, is wonderful and the closing spectacle, Historic Review of America, brought the audience to its feet with a roar of applause. The show has been enlarged and there is a third more seating capacity than last year. The big top is entirely new.

"The Mumauts, 9 people Jap act, versatile artists, who were detained on account of the quarantine in Mexico City will join at Ames, Iowa."

The *Billboard* had sent its Kansas City office representative, Irene Skelly, to the Robbins opener, however her full review of the show did not appear until the May 9, 1925 issue. Her review, one of the most descriptive and complete, especially of the specs this author has ever seen in that publication during this period of circus history, is printed here in its entirety. It is interesting to note the feminine touch of the reviewer in her article.

"COMPLETE REVIEW OF ROBBINS BROS. CIRCUS. Perry, Iowa, April 25—The show opened with the spec, Fairyland. Marceline Montague, seated as a royal princess on an elephant in front of the grandstand,

sings in a clear soprano voice. 'Across the Burning Sands'. This is followed by a song from the king, John Dobbs, seated on the side stage. The next is a song, 'My Fairy Princess' by Miss Montague, and with red lights burning on each side of the center stage, the feature dancer descends and goes through a pretty dance. Fairyland is brought to a close by the princess singing with a chorus as the people depart from the arena. The acts then follow in this order.

"Riding Dogs and Monkeys and Shetland ponies, presented by Kate Smith, charming in a black-spangled costume and easily mistress of the animals, which go through their paces with a snap and pep seldom seen in an opening show. Riding dogs and monkeys and Shetland ponies in charge of Tom Smith. The white Eskimo dogs are well handled.

"Performing elephants, 5 big ones in Ring 1, and 4 smaller ones in Ring 2, presented by C.H. Baudendistel (Hi Pockets) and James Marvin. These huge beasts dance, sit down, lay down, and roll over as easily and actively as young dogs and show their splendid training.

"Mary Boden and Segal sisters in pleasing iron-jaw numbers on the stage.

"Mrs. Smith and her trained troupe of dogs, the toy poodle dance especially pleasing the children. 'Sport' jumping thru hoops of fire is excellent.

"Clown walkaround. Kenneth Waite, producing clown, scored with his 'cross word puzzle' madman bit, as did the other joeys with their gags.

"Catherine Granger and Bobby Harris, good looking young ladies with lots of pep and ginger in bareback riding. The clowns came in again and have lots of fun doing their barber shop stunt. Ponca Bill's Wild West Show people and Lulu B. Parr, lady bronk rider, are introduced.

"Swinging ladders, Hazel Kirke and Billy Niquette. Clever and interesting

Photo No. 14—Robbins Bros. billing daub at Aberdeen, S.D., June 6, 1925. Unidentified biller stands at right. Circus World Museum (Baraboo, Wis.) Photo.





Photo No. 18—Belgium Tableau used as No. 1 Bandwagon in Robbins Bros. parade at McCook, Neb., Aug. 8, 1925. Band director O.L. Gilson with trombone sits at right front corner. Joe Fleming Collection.

acts. Some more fun with the clowns.

"Kate Smith and her high-jumping wolfhounds and leaping greyhounds. Lots of applause. Clever act.

"Chester Sherman, dancing clown, who is an A-1 dancer. Has lady-figure partner.

"Reproduction of the old pony express which the audience liked.

"Captain Tiebor and his sea lions. These seals are well trained and go thru their act with no 'false steps' or mistakes, and the act is brought to a climax by one of the seals playing the national anthem on the horns.

"Trick and fancy roping and rope spinning by the cowboys. The clowns come in and get some more laughs.

"Elephants do a clown naval act around the arena. The crowd liked this.

"The Four Riding Davenports, featuring Freddie Freeman, comedian. The two girls have lovely yellow and white costumes and ride well. Freddie, of course, is the cynosure of all eyes and his excellent riding and comedy tricks get much applause and laughter.

"Iron-jaw acts by Segal Sisters and Mary Boden, which pleased.

"English hunting scene, showing high jumping as the feature. Riders: Lucretia Waite, Lizzie Kelley, Martha Jordan, Hazel Kirke, Marion McGraw, Helen Kimball, Mary Rickman, Ruby Grimes, Hazel Grimes, Hazel Mason, Louise Sinnott, Catherine Granger, Bobby Harris.

"Enactment of an attack on the old covered wagon, showing Indians, the

creeping informer, the hanging of the informer by the cowboys when they arrive and drag him off in the dust, etc.

"Historic Review of America, closing spectacle. The first real Americans, the Indians. Chief Red Feather and 16 genuine Indians who took Ring 1; the first call to defend the flag—the memorable ride of Paul Revere, enacted by Tom Privett in Ring 2; The Spirit of 1776 by George Done, Jimmy Slate, and Chester Sherman in the arena; on stage, Minute Men; the making of the first flag, Betsy Ross, portrayed by Rose Grimes; the first president, George Washington by Tracy Andrews, takes stand on center stage.

"An episode of the Civil War, U.S. Grant by Ed Hall and 6 Northern soldiers; Gen. Robert E. Lee delivering his sword in surrender with escort of 6 Southern soldiers; Ed Bowden, mounted in the arena.

"The greatest character of American history, Abraham Lincoln, by Frank Shipman, placed on center stage; Spanish-American War—Teddy Roosevelt and his Rough Riders by Luther Privett and the cowboys; World's War—the boys who went over there—a squad of the American heroes and the band playing that thrilling march, 'Over There', brought cheers and bravos from the crowd.

"Our President, Calvin Coolidge, by Fred Poole, on center stage. Side back stage, Columbia, Marceline Montague, walks to center stage and joins the figures of history. There is a mammoth American flag making a complete background. The dove of peace, Mary Bowden, arises over the assemblage and as the company sings, 'America,' the audience rose to its feet and cheered and joined in the singing of 'America'.

"The concert includes wrestling, cowboys, and cowgirls, Indians, led by Chief Red Feather, etc., and played to large, interesting crowds on opening day."

The review also included the sideshow lineup under management of Milton Robbins as follows: Frank Jay Baker, asst. manager, inside lecturer, magician, and Punch and Judy; Lee and P.K. Kula, troupe of 5 Hawaiians; Elouise, mindreader; Omar Kyro, fire eater and sword swallower; Loretto, big snake; Harry Martell, escape artist; Cuban Mack, knife thrower. Princess Marine Gallucci, the feature attraction, but 31 inches high, 22 years old, weighs 36 lbs; Nick Gallucci, Hawaiian dancer; J.S. Riggers, with 10 piece minstrel band.

The second sideshow, or pit show, featured Cleopatra, half snake and half woman, in charge of Jesse Coleman.

Listed in the review are 12 ballet girls, dancers; clown alley had 22 joeys; O.L. Gilson's big show band had 22 members, while the wild west

department had 9 people plus Chief Red Feather and tribe of 14 Indians. Mose Becker was superintendent of the candy stands.

The same *Billboard* said the show after its opening stand then moved to Des Moines for a two day engagement, Sunday and Monday, April 26-27, under auspices of the Argonne Post of the American Legion. Robbins Bros. succeeded in scheduling the Sunday playing date over the protests of a number of local ministers. The show had excellent billing and publicity and actually the controversy with the local divines resulted in favorable stories with big headlines in the local press telling of the situation and the 'fight' to prevent the circus playing Des Moines on Sunday. In the street parade there were 40 regular army soldiers from nearby Ft. Dodge, the American Legion band, mounted police of the City of Des Moines, and a regiment of Legionnaires, all of which were added features that helped make the show's downtown march an even more glittering and pleasing event. The leading stores all had billing posters of the show in their windows and the largest department store had in one of its main windows a miniature circus with elephants, camels, dogs, etc., of very lifelike proportions. Everywhere in the city was to be seen bright yellow circus 'date sheets' with their red letters, evidence showing the able work done by the advance car. General agent, Ed L. Brannan, visited in Des Moines and then left for Chicago.

Photo No. 19—Clown band riding South America Tableau in Robbins Bros. parade, McCook, Neb., Aug. 8, 1925. Joe Fleming Collection.



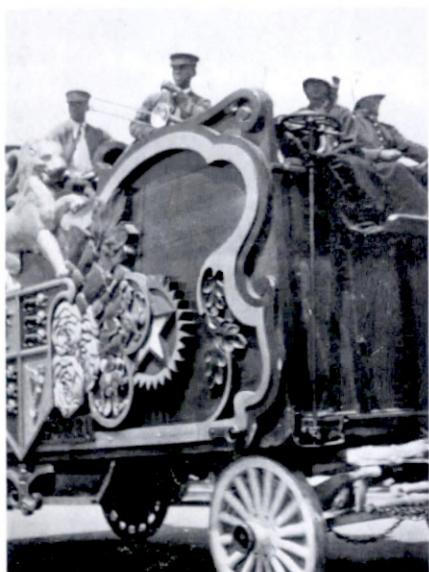
Business was described as being very good.

After the two day Des Moines stand the show continued in Iowa playing dates at Ames, Belle Plaine, Cedar Rapids, Manchester, and Dubuque, then went into Illinois for a single engagement at Rock Island, May 4. Robbins returned immediately to Iowa at Muscatine and remained in its home state for a total of 17 consecutive stands. After giving two performances in Hawarden, May 23, the show moved on a Sunday run into South Dakota for four dates. One additional stand in Iowa followed, at Rock Rapids, May 29, then it was on to Minnesota at Worthington the next day.

The June 13, 1925 *Billboard* said that Robins Bros. had played to good business in Iowa and South Dakota and was now experiencing some hot and dry weather. Fine takes came in South Dakota at Yankton, Wagner, Mitchell, and Sioux Falls. Rock Rapids, Iowa, was also a profitable day. Other notes were that equestrian director, Bert Rickman, was receiving congratulations on the way he handles the performance and his new creation, 'Arabian Nights' is a big factor in the show's success. O.A. Gilson's 22 piece band also has had much favorable comment. Milt Robbins' sideshow has been doing big business as had Peggy Poole's pit show. The Milt Robbins family visited the Perry Bros. wagon circus at Norfolk, Neb., May 24. Mrs. Robbins' father is Henry Kerns, bandleader of Perry Bros. Robbins reported the Perry outfit to be a fine overland show.

June 1 found Robbins Bros. at Mankato, Minn. which was followed by

Photo No. 20—Sideshow band riding Great Britain Tableau in Robbins Bros. parade, McCook, Neb., Aug. 8, 1925. Joe Fleming Collection.



Marshall and Canby and then it was a return visit to South Dakota for Watertown, Huron, Aberdeen, and Eureka. Moving up into North Dakota the show played four stands, the initial date coming at Linton, June 9. Moving westward the show went into Montana at Sidney, June 13, to begin a short tour of four stands in that state.

The July 4, 1925 *Billboard* noted that Robbins had done well in this area and Montana dates at Bainville, Scobey, and Wolf Point produced good takes. The North Dakota stands which followed were also good with especially fine stands coming at Williston, Towner, Kenmare, and Crosby. John Schiller entertained members of Hauskin's Mutt and Jeff Company when Robbins was at Scobey, Mont., June 16, and members of the Herbert Bros. Musical Comedy Co. were guests of the show at Williston, N.D. A final item reported that Virgil Young was the new Robbins Bros. property boss. He had formerly been with the John Robinson and Al G. Barnes circuses.

The show played two days in Carrington, N.D., June 22-23, after which came another tour of Minnesota with stands at Detroit, Wadena, Little Falls, and Anoka. The only dates played in Wisconsin were made on the final two days in June at Black River Falls and Menomonie. July 1 saw Robbins Bros. back in Minnesota at Winona.

As the summer of 1925 came on the scene most circuses on the road were reporting fair to good business. There had been considerably bad weather in many sections of the country, some in the area Robbins had traversed during its early weeks. There had been one circus casualty. The Frank J. Taylor's Great American Circus had been framed as a 10 car railroad show during the early spring in South Omaha, Neb. and opened May 23 in Albright, Neb. It lasted only a few weeks and folded July 20 at Wahoo, Neb. A period of very wet weather the show encountered was said to have been the reason for the show's downfall, however many old troupers have told the tale that it had been Fred Buchanan who had sold Taylor on the particular route his show had followed, knowing it was bound to fail. Had the Taylor circus succeeded it would have been playing in territory Buchanan claimed to be his own.

Winona, Minn., July 1, was an interesting stand for Robbins Bros. as it was here that Buchanan took delivery on the three elephants he purchased from Snake King as mentioned earlier. General Agent Ed Brannon was in the Chicago office of the *Billboard* the next day telling this news and the story was printed in the July 11, 1925 issue. The article said the new elephants now gave the Robbins show an even dozen in its herd. Other notes in the article

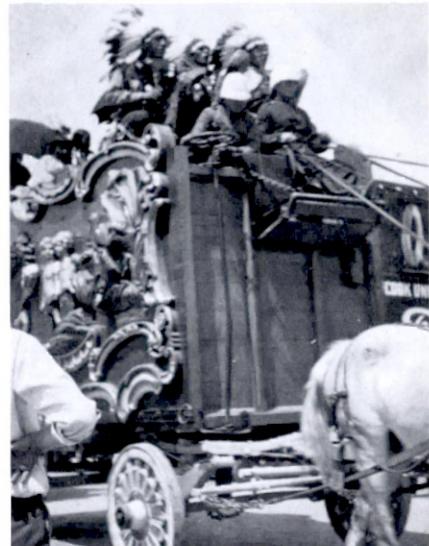


Photo No. 21—Indians riding Africa (India or Hippo) tableau wagon in Robbins Bros. parade, McCook, Neb., Aug. 8, 1925. Joe Fleming Collection.

mentioned that the show had done excellent business in the Dakotas, Minnesota, and Wisconsin. Andrew Downie, who had operated the Walter L. Main Circus in 1924, and family enroute on a motor trip to Winnipeg visited Robbins Bros. on the lot at Menomonie, Wis., June 30. Another former circus owner, J.H. Eschman, visited at Anoka, Minn. Also at Anoka, Stick Davenport bought a fine high-jumping horse named, Prince Dan, while Buchanan and Joe Lloyd, boss hostler, bought one team of blacks, a team of gray draft stock, and a spotted horse from Zimmerman & Barrett at Midway, Minn. The team of blacks was to be used on the No. 1 bandwagon in the street parade and the spotted horse in the menage act. The article said that Gus Sauerwein was currently playing the air calliope on the show.

The following stand at Rochester, Minn., July 2, was even more notable than the day before in Winona as a violent storm felled the big top and damaged it to the extent a replacement had to be ordered immediately.

It was back into Iowa for Robbins at Osage, July 3, then came a week which saw the show moving back and forth and playing in a total of five states. Another Iowa date came at Sumner, July 4, then came Fairbault, Minn., Olivia, Iowa, Ortonville, Minn., Ellendale, N.D., Mobridge and Lemmon, S.D., and finally the show moved on to Montana for a series of 8 stands beginning with Baker on July 12.

The Aug. 1, 1925 *Billboard* covered the Robbins activities of late and said the show had found business good on its second trip through Montana. Baker was a red one in the afternoon but no night performance was given on



account of the long run to Roundup the next day where there was also good business. Lewiston, Great Falls, Big Sandy, Malta, and Glasgow were all excellent stands. Final date in Montana was at Plentywood, July 20. A replacement big top which had been ordered from Driver Bros. following the blowdown at Rochester arrived in Mobridge, S.D., July 10. It was a 130 ft. round with three 50's, and two sets of quarter poles, same size as the tent destroyed. A new top was on order to be delivered when ready. There were a number of personnel notes in this article. Fred Gay, who was producing clown on the short lived Frank J. Taylor Circus joined clown alley at Mobridge, Princess Blue Feather joined at Lewistown, Mont., July 14, and Lee Kula who had a bad fall in the street parade was now back in the sideshow. Harvey Beach was the show's new boss canvasman.

Leaving Montana the show moved eastward into North Dakota and played dates at Stanley, Bottineau, Rolla, Maddock, and Oakes. Buchanan seemed to never be too far away from his home state and after the North Dakota tour returned to Iowa for Sioux City and Missouri Valley, and afterwards moved into Nebraska at David City, July 29. Robbins then went across Nebraska in a series of seven dates heading toward Colorado. The show played Sterling, Colo., August 6, was in Wray the next day, then returned to Nebraska at McCook, August 8.

The Aug. 8, 1925 *Billboard* said that Harry Billick of the Gold Medal Shows (carnival) visited Robbins Bros. at York, Neb., July 30, and reported that business was so big it was necessary to give 3 performances and that every one was a capacity house. "More peo-

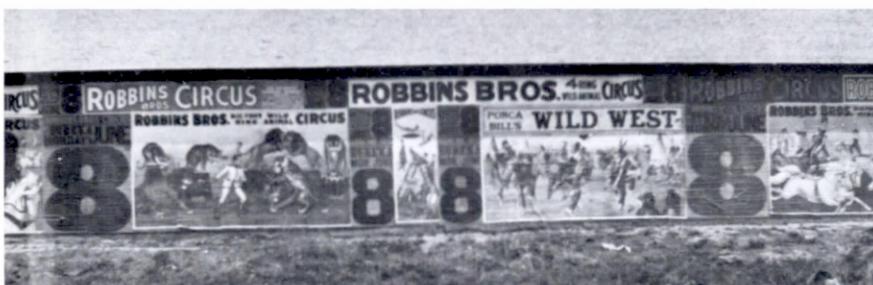
Photo No. 16—Robbins Bros. billing daub at Sidney, Mont., June 17, 1925. Photo by Ben J. Kubly.

ple than I ever before saw at one time at any show in years," said Billick.

The Aug. 22, 1925 *Billboard* continued with coverage of the Robbins tour thru Nebraska and Colorado and reported that at Ord, Neb., Aug. 3, there was a big crowd at the matinee and a fine house at night. Kearney, Neb., the next day saw crowds packed to the ring banks at the matinee but the night show was called off due to a threatening storm. At North Platte, Aug. 5, a windstorm hit during the matinee and Buchanan ordered all people from the big top. The tent was lowered to the seats just in time to prevent a serious situation. In Sterling, Colo., Aug. 6, there was big attendance at both performances. The mayor, city council, and Chamber of Commerce all went on record through the columns of *The Daily Advocate* as endorsing Robbins Bros. as one of the cleanest, best, tented organizations before the public today. Wray, Colo., produced good business and McCook, Neb., Aug. 8, was one of the red letter events of the week as two capacity crowds turned out. At McCook personnel of the Dubinsky Bros. stock company which was playing a week's engagement there visited the show.

Although not specifically mentioned in the *Billboard*, certainly another of the red letter events of the week occurring at McCook has to be the visit to the show that day of CHS member Joe Fleming of nearby Trenton, Neb. One of the all time great circus fans and

Photo No. 17—Huge Robbins Bros. billing daub at Eureka, S.D., June 8, 1925. Photo by Ben J. Kubly.



long time personal friend of the author, Joe Fleming, made his first visit ever to Robbins Bros. when the show played McCook on Aug. 8, 1925. At the author's request he has very kindly provided us with his recollections of that day. His account reads as follows:

"I caught up with the Robbins Bros. Circus for the first time in McCook, Neb. on August 8, 1925. I had heard that it was different from most circuses and I found this to be very true. There had been shows that billed themselves as 'The Show That Is Different,' and although the billing for Robbins Bros. laid no claim to this fact, or at least did not stress it, this show truly was different.

"The street parade was advertised as 'The Parade of the Nations' and it featured the beautiful Spellman wagons that carried carvings representing the United States, Great Britain, Belgium, France, and other nations. The fine tabs carried the bands in parade and of course were also used to load baggage into. This show leaned towards the wild west angle as was the custom of most of the big shows of the time, however, this show leaned a bit further towards the wild west than most others. They advertised Ponca Bill's Wild West and had a big bunch of Sioux Indians from the Pine Ridge and/or Rose Bud Reservations and the Indians rode horses in parade or on tableau wagons.

"The Robbins Bros. Circus billed the towns heavily with beautiful paper. At this late date I could not say who's paper this was but it is a safe bet that it was printed by Erie. In those days there were still livery barns, lumber sheds, and other such buildings a plenty in this area and these spots were covered and the windows were filled with lithos. A newspaper courier was sent out to all rural patrons and there was good coverage in the newspapers.

"It is my uneducated opinion that O.A. Gilson's band was one of the best on the road. In parade Gilson rode on the right front corner of the No. 1 bandwagon which was Belgium and played a slide trombone. Needless to say he played it very good too. A cowboy, a lady, and an Indian led the parade carrying American flags. The clown band rode on the South America tab, the sideshow band rode on the Great Britain wagon, and the United States wagon carried a band dressed as U.S. sailors and played the 'Stars and Stripes Forever' march. Four rather small mules pulled a covered wagon and this wagon also took part in the performance. Some sideshow plunder was loaded into it when the show loaded out at night. A team of six ponies pulled a cage and there was a nice bunch of regular sized cages pulled by big teams. The air calliope was pulled by six ponies and of course

a steam calliope brought up the rear.

"As was the custom of all shows of the time this one started off the program with a fine march around spec with Gilson's band beating out a blood tingler. All marchers beat a drum, or a gong, and all mounted people rang a hand bell in time with the music. They marched in step and beat out their various 'things' in time too. In those days more attention was paid to such details than there is now days. The spec ended with Minnie Atzen's singing from atop a bull.

"Performance was presented in two rings and a center stage and a lot of it on the hippodrome track. Lots of Indians and cowboys were on this show and quite a few western acts appeared during the regular performance as well as in the aftershow. A cowboy dragged the horse thief behind his steed at a dead run then they hanged him. Pioneers came in with the covered wagon, camped for the night, the Indians crept up and set the wagon afire and a bunch of cowboys appeared about that time and chased the Indians off. Trick riders, trick ropers, fox hunters, and other such acts appeared on the track during the program.

The advance advertising had played up the closing spec, 'Historic America' and it was surely a goodie. Gilson's band played appropriate music while important characters from the past marched in and took their places in the center of the tent. These people included Abe Lincoln and other past presidents; Teddy Roosevelt and his rough riders dashed in and lined up, a fife and drum corps, World War I soldiers and Red Cross nurses and many others came in, and as a grand finale a huge American flag that had been rolled up under the peaks was dropped down while the band cut loose with the 'Stars and Stripes Forever'.

"The Robbins Bros. Circus was a very popular show in this area. I had no camera in 1925 but while wandering around in the backyard after the matinee I came upon Minnie Atzen, the prima donna, setting on a wagon tongue while writing a letter. I asked her if she knew of any one on the show that would happen to have some pictures that I could buy. She was a very gracious lady and although she knew of no camera fan on the show she did furnish me with a shot of Lulu Parr, cowgirl, on her spotted horse, 'Major', and one of two girls of the riding act (Daventports) on their rosin back. A kind neighbor lady shot a roll of film for me during the parade. A groom heard me talking to Minnie Atzen and went and got two pictures of rosin backs from his belongings and gave them to me, and this was my quota of pictures of that show in 1925."

After the McCook stand the show made a Sunday run of 117 miles to Phillipsburg, Kansas where two per-



Photo No. 7—Robbins Bros. spec girls on lot about 1925. Pfening Collection.

formances were given on Monday, Aug. 10. There was a big turnout at the matinee and the top was filled at night. A fine new set of 12 double deck banners for the sideshow was put into use for the first time in Phillipsburg. Also according to the *Billboard* a new big top which had been ordered following the blowdown in Rochester, Minn. back on July 2 was used for the first time here. It was a 130 ft. round with three 50's and two sets of quarter poles. The report of the new big top is a little confusing since it was mentioned that a big top was received by the show at Mobridge, S.D., July 10. If both reports are correct then in all probability the top put up in Mobridge was one for temporary use until the new top could be completed and shipped to the show. Another interesting item in the trade publication said that John Schultz, the Robbins menagerie superintendent had installed a new 5 tube radio equipped with a loud speaker underneath the new lion den, Cage No. 22, and entertains the boys riding the flat cars on the long runs.

At Smith Center, Kan., August 11, the locals packed the big top in the afternoon but no show was given in the evening on account of an approaching storm. The good take in Smith Center was surprising as it was in an area of a sizeable wheat crop failure. Business was also big at both performances in Clay Center, Aug. 12, where the wheat harvest was estimated at only half of normal and conditions were none too good for the corn crop. According to the *Billboard*, a new den filled with parrots, cockatoos, and golden pheasants arrived and was added to the menagerie in Clay Center. Business continued big at Maryville the next day and at Seneca, the stand turned out to be the best yet in the string of exceptionally good dates in this area of

Kansas. Locals said the crop conditions around Seneca were much better than in other parts of the state. At the matinee the overflow audience was seated on the ground and another good crowd came at night. Business continued strong at Hiawatha, Aug. 15, with two capacity houses which was the final stand in Kansas before returning to Nebraska for Nebraska City and Tecumseh. The show next dipped down into Kansas again to play Atchison, then headed eastward into Missouri for Maryville and Albany. Next came another short visit to Iowa for stands at Mt. Ayer and Centerville.

Going back into Missouri at Trenton, Aug. 25, the show played additional stands in the state at Brookfield, Cameron, Macon, and Hannibal, and on the final day of August was in Canton, Illinois.

The Sept. 5, 1925 *Billboard* covering recent Robbins happenings said that when the show left Kansas following its date in Hiawatha there was only a 65 mile run to Nebraska City, Neb., consequently the train arrived early Sunday morning and found a big crowd of townspeople waiting to see the circus unload. A cloudburst hit that Sunday night and again very early Monday morning but the skies cleared off before 5 a.m. A capacity crowd came for the matinee with another fine house at night. Tecumseh, Neb., Aug. 18, produced an exceptionally good take with a turnaway at the matinee and a huge night house. The stand was located in the center of the famous Nebraska corn belt where the crop this year had been unusually good. A washout on the C.B. & Q. railroad made it necessary for the train to be rerouted on a 175 mile run to reach Atchison, Kansas. The resulting late arrival made it impossible to give a parade. The matinee started at 3 p.m. with the crowd packed to the ring curbs. A lot of prominent show people visited in Atchison. Buchanan called off the



Photo No. 22—Sioux Indian carrying flag in Robbins Bros. parade, McCook, Neb., Aug. 8, 1925. The rider is Cuban Mack, also known as Willy Bowlegs, who was a knife thrower in the sideshow. Joe Fleming Collection.

night performance on account of an approaching wind and electrical storm which lasted for four hours. The muddy lot and long haul caused another delay in getting into Maryville, Mo. There was a capacity crowd for the matinee which started at 4 p.m. and the big top was filled at night. There were two more good houses at Albany, Mo. the following day. There was a late arrival in Mt. Ayer, Iowa, Aug. 22. One off the largest crowds of the season was waiting in the rail yards for the train to come in. A short haul to the lot made it possible for the parade to go out on time, and at both performances the Robbins show continued its winning ways as there were large crowds in the big top.

With August gone and summer almost passed the *Billboard* ran an interesting article on the status of circus business so far in the season. The article was headlined 'Circuses are Prospering' and went on to say that agents dropping by the Chicago office advised business with their circuses was good. John Robinson was doing fine in Virginia at present. Sells-Floto was meeting with a good reception in Kansas, while Hagenbeck-Wallace sends fine reports of its business in Iowa. Another report had it that the 101 Ranch Wild West was having a splendid week. Robbins Bros. had been play-

ing to fine business in Kansas and Nebraska. Weatherwise, it had been pleasant in most parts of the country but sections of the south were into a very serious drought and before long other parts of the south and central areas of the country would be flooded with torrential rains.

Robbins was at Aledo, Ill., September 1, and the next day played Ft. Madison, Iowa, which would be the final stand in the show's home state in 1925. The show during the season had made eight separate journeys into Iowa. It moved into Missouri at Louisiana on September 3 to begin a series of 18 continuous dates in that state. Labor Day, Sept. 7, found the show at Lexington, Mo. and the beginning of a week of very good business. There was a runaway at the matinee in Lexington plus a large crowd at night. The *Daily Advertiser and Intelligencer* stated the show was one of the cleanest and best circuses that ever visited the city. After Lexington the show played California, Mo. where members of the J. Doug Morgan Co. were guests. There was a late arrival the next day in Sweet Springs and the parade was called off. A capacity crowd was on hand for the matinee but no evening performance was scheduled on account of the long run to the next stand in Jefferson City, which turned out to be one of the biggest dates in the state. Gov. Sam Baker and family attended the matinee and the performance was broadcast by station WOS. Troupers of the Princess Stock Co. also visited.

Owing to a mishap to one of the flat cars the train arrived late in Warrensburg, Mo., Sept. 11. This, along with a lengthy haul to the lot, caused the street parade to be cancelled but business was good. There was also a good take at Butler, Mo. the following day. Buchanan was pleasantly surprised that the show had done so well in Missouri during the first part of its tour through the state. The show had played through a section which had been declared to be in poor financial condition on account of local crop failures but evidently the natives still had enough loot on hand to see the circus.

Additional Missouri stands at Lamar, Harrisonville, Osceola, Bolivar, and Marshfield all gave good business. Will Hays, who had been legal adjuster with Gentry-Patterson joined Robbins in Osceola, Sept. 16, to serve as banner solicitor, one day ahead, for Kenneth R. Waite. While in the area Mr. and Mrs. Fred Buchanan motored to Pittsburg, Kan. to visit Sells-Floto. Out of courtesy to business men and the local Chamber of Commerce the evening performance in Lebanon, Mo., Saturday, Sept. 19, didn't start until 8:30 p.m. The show experienced a very fine take that day.

Next came a Sunday run of 169 miles to West Plains, Mo. where the train arrived at noon and performances presented the next day. At West Plains the show used the American Legion athletic field for the first time. Despite a rainy day and no parade good business was done. The show also encountered rain at Mountain Grove, Mo. the next day but gave a parade and had a fine take. Weather and other conditions were none too favorable at Monett but still there were two fine crowds. The current Missouri tour came to a close in Monett, Sept. 23 and was said to have been very successful. Visitors to the show while in Missouri said that Bert Rickman had added a fine new principal riding act, the riders being Helen Morse, Mary Richman, Billy Burton, Lady Privellt, Grace Hackman, Adelaide Myers, and Joe Ryan.

In contrast to the winning ways of Robbins Bros. the Gentry-Patterson Circus closed suddenly at Conway, Ark., Sept. 18, after a run of poor business. The halt was ordered by the Miami County Bank and Trust Co. of Paola, Kan. which held a mortgage on the circus properties. A short time later, Chester Monahan's newly enlarged 10 car Gollmar Bros. Circus would hit a lengthy spell of wet weather in Kentucky and Tennessee and suffer the fate of Gentry-Patterson, with its properties being repossessed by the American Circus Corporation.

The rainy weather which finished off Gollmar Bros. was widespread over the lower Mississippi valley states and Robbins ran into more of it as it moved into Oklahoma with initial stand coming at Miami, Sept. 24. The

Photo No. 24—Two lady members of the Riding Davenports on their famed horse, Nellie (also called Old Grandmaw), on Robbins Bros. lot, season of 1925. This elderly horse died July 4, 1928. Joe Fleming Collection.



following day in Sapulpa business was surprisingly good despite the rainy weather. Two good houses were present. Business conditions here and in the adjacent oil fields were said to have picked up recently. In contrast to the wet weather of late there was an ideal weather day at Chandler, Okla., Sept. 26, and business was big. The two specs, Arabian Nights, and Historic America came in for fine notices in the press in several of the Oklahoma cities. Robbins played 13 consecutive dates in Oklahoma with the final stand coming at Sallisaw, October 9. Moving next into Arkansas the show played dates in Clarksville, Atkins, and Corning, then returned to Missouri at Charleston, Oct. 13.

The Oct. 17, 1925 *Billboard* had an interesting article about Robbins Bros. recent tour and said the show had done fine business in Oklahoma with the banner day of the season at Mangum, Oct. 2, where there was a turnaway at the matinee and capacity house at night. The tremendous take had come despite Al G. Barnes playing the city a week previous. Other good stands were at Watonga, Weatherford, Anadarko, and Elk City. At Mangum, Okla. troupers from the Western Peck's Bad Boy Company were guests of the show. Fred Buchanan said he was delighted with the results of the show's publicity campaign this season, especially that of the press department under the direction of his brother, Will. Other notes said that orders have been placed for all new parade and spec wardrobe for next season and that equestrian director, Bert Rickman, would produce a new spectacle for the show in 1926. A final item said that Buchanan had purchased new all steel Pullman sleepers, one being a fine stateroom car, and a new steel advance car which will be used next season. (Author's note. The report of a new advance car is in error as photos (to appear in the next installment) picture the car to be the same as used in 1924 and 1925. Possibly additional sleepers were acquired to replace older cars but certainly they were not new "all steel" Pullmans. Buchanan never did have any of that kind. In fact, the finest name trains in the country were just beginning to get this type of car in 1925.)

The following week's *Billboard*, Oct. 24, 1925 issue, gave additional news of the Robbins route through Oklahoma and Arkansas. The show was still getting some good business in spite of a period of very inclement weather. At Wewoka, Okla., Oct. 5, there were two fine houses and the same occurred the following day in Weleetka, Okla. Despite a rainy day in Quinton, Okla., Oct. 7, the afternoon house was fair but good at night. The show had little difficulty in getting off the muddy lot that night and the train pulled out



Photo No. 15—Robbins Bros. billers posted this large hippo sheet on a commercial billboard in 1925. Circus World Museum (Baraboo, Wis.) Photo.

about 1 a.m. for Sallisaw, Okla. where the matinee crowd was the smallest of the season but the night house good. It was 1 a.m. before the show got off the lot that evening due to its soft condition caused by recent rains. At the initial Arkansas date, Clarksville, Oct. 9, Robbins played under auspices of the local fair association despite the fact that Isler Greater Shows (carnival) was currently playing the fair. The show had a turnaway in the afternoon with a big turnout at night. The cotton crop in the area had been very good that fall and the locals had money to spend. The soft, muddy, lot caused loading problems that evening and it was 3 a.m. when the last wagon was loaded on the train. Two fine houses came the next day at Atkins, Ark. A final note said that the Matusmoto Troupe of 8 Japanese had signed a two year contract with Robbins.

After playing Corning, Ark., Oct. 12, the show moved up into Missouri for stands at Charleston, Dexter, New Madrid, and Campbell. Then it returned to Arkansas and played DeWitt, England, Fordyce, Stamps, Nashville, Prescott, and Walnut Ridge. Robbins next moved back into Missouri where the final stand of the season came at Thayer on October 27. Following two performances in Thayer the show returned to its quarters in Granger, Iowa.

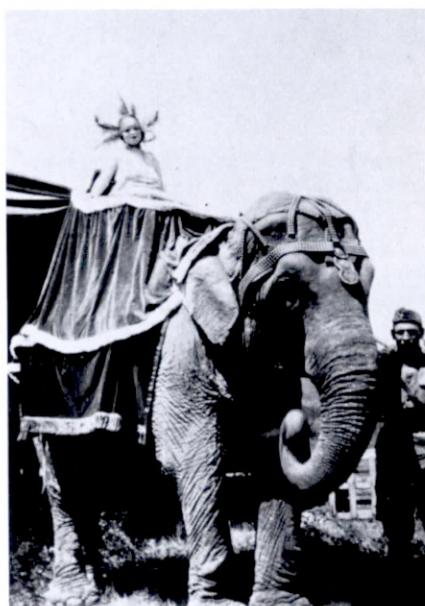
Robbins Bros., statistics for the 1925 season as reported in the *Billboard* said the show exhibited in 277 cities, 18 states, and covered a total mileage of 18,677. Three performances were given at 15 of the stands. F. Robert Saul, the show's press agent, termed the season most successful.

The Nov. 14, 1925 *Billboard* advised that Robbins Bros. was currently in quarters in Granger. The report said

the season was successful despite a vast amount of wet weather which was experienced in Arkansas and Oklahoma. Press representative Will Buchanan accompanied the train to Granger and C.W. Buchanan had also returned to the quarters. John Schultz was in charge of the animals in Granger.

A most interesting article that appeared in the Dec. 12, 1925 *Billboard* was titled, "The Circus Season of 1925" by Fletcher Smith. The author gave a comprehensive report of the season just completed. It was mentioned that of the three American Circus Corporation shows, John Robinson did the best business, followed by Hagenbeck-Wallace, and finally, Sells-Floto.

Photo No. 26—Elephant, Columbia, with unidentified spec lady on top, Robbins Bros., season of 1925. Spencer Huntley is at right. Joe Rettinger Collection.



Robinson's first place was due mainly to the good tour of Florida in the fall ahead of other shows. Weatherwise, the South had its worst in years, with a drought in Georgia, followed by heavy rains for weeks that covered much of the south and hurt all shows. The article also had this to say.

"Fred Buchanan with his Robbins Bros. Circus had a good season. He stayed in his own territory all season and closed when the bad weather set in this fall."

Actually, Robbins closed only three days earlier than in 1924 and had its share of the wet stuff at many stands during its final weeks of the season. Possibly, Buchanan had planned to

stay out a little longer, but if so, no mention of the fact was made in the trade publications other than Fletcher Smith's statement.

Buchanan had now completed three consecutive profitable seasons since he returned as the owner of a railroad circus. His territory, as mentioned by Fletcher Smith, was primarily farming communities that ranged just west of the Mississippi from Minnesota south to Arkansas and west to the Rockies in Montana and Colorado. As was his custom Buchanan would wander back and forth in this area, carefully routing his show according to weather and economic conditions. This was

agricultural territory primarily and Buchanan's knowledge of it, which enabled him to put his show into the right spots at the right time, always moving back and forth with no set route pattern determined long in advance, was a prime factor for his success during these years. Also the type of performance he presented with the heavy emphasis on the wild west angle was popular with the natives in this area. Although graft was present as ever in the sideshow it evidently had been toned down considerably since 1923 and caused few ripples during the season just completed. Buchanan's Robbins Bros. Circus was headed upward in the circus world.

Robbins Bros. Historic Review of America Spec

Fred Buchanan personally created a closing spec or finale in mid season 1924 for his Robbins Bros. Circus. Those who knew Buchanan said he was a very patriotic individual and wanted a spec of this nature for his show during the

1920's. World War I was still vividly remembered by the populace and patriotism was strong especially in large farm belt areas of mid America where Buchanan's shows usually played. Very little appeared in the trade publications in 1924 about Buchanan's new Historic America spec but fortunately we have a full description of the spec that closed the 1925 performance. Specially designed billing paper and newspaper advertisements were used extensively that

season. Buchanan continued to use and well advertise the Historic America spec through the 1930 season. The remarkable set of photos printed here were furnished by Joe Rettinger and originally came from the collection of the late William H. Woodcock, Sr. Exact date of the photos is uncertain but is believed to be 1925 because the names of several of the characters depicted check with names in the *Billboard* account of the spec that season.



Photo No. 2—Spirit of 76 Group, Robbins Bros. Historic America spec, season of 1925. Joe Rettinger Collection.

Photo No. 1—Tracy Andrews dressed as General George Washington for Robbins Bros. Historic America spec in 1925. Joe Rettinger Collection.



Photo No. 3—Frank Shipman as Abraham Lincoln in Robbins Bros. Historic Review of America spec, 1925. In background is Indian teepee and portion of the South America tableau. Joe Rettinger Collection.

Photo No. 4—Spencer Huntley (far left) and group of World War I soldiers in Robbins Bros. Historic America spec, 1925. Joe Rettinger Collection.



With Ringling-Barnum in 1935

by Warren H. Wood

Col. Tim McCoy was the big attraction for the '35 season. On May 13th I rejoined the show in Brooklyn, N.Y. for the opening stand under canvas on Flatbush Ave. Ed Kelty the photographer showed up in Brooklyn, put his tripod and camera up in the back end of the blues just before doors and then took off for parts unknown. All of a sudden the rush was on and just by luck I managed to drag his equipment out from under the thundering herd.

The usual stands were made on the eastern swing with a trek thru New England and then played mostly the mid west and the usual route when not making the west coast. Wheeling, W.Va. produced a character from the hills, a young barefoot mountaineer who made an annual trek to the circus. His appearance created quite a stir among all the show personnel, including the brass, kinkers and just plain workers. He was given the red carpet treatment from start to finish. From the best reserved seat in the house the butchers loaded him with hot dogs, pop and peanuts and when he headed back for the hills he looked like a mobile concession stand.

Sometimes I would hold Tim McCoy's horse while he made his big horse catch. Jimmy Whelan frequently bemoaned the scatter shot Tim used while shooting at glass balls. McCoy was a real gentleman and I had the pleasure of an informal chat with him in a drug store over an ice cream soda. On the wild west subject someone informed me that Booger McCarthy bronc rider and husband of Anne Hutchinson brought his saddle and bridle into the pullman coach when he first joined out. Tey Cooper an old fixture of the 101 Ranch joined McCoy's line up.

Walter Wappenstein the 24 hour man's son worked as an usher and Tony Ballinger agent for Sparks had his son placed as a ticket seller. Clyde Mallory of the advance also had his brother Harry ushering. I had my first aeroplane ride at Madison, Wis. Paul Wentzel the clown went up with me. This was between shows, but I was still late for doors. A rather serious and one not so serious occurrence took place at Albany, Ga. During spec one of the bulls following a trio of two big top jigs carrying a kettle drum between two poles with the drum beater in between spooked and made a fast unpredictable move in the direction of the trio. They

in turn made a fast exit for the seats literally lifting the man in the middle off his feet in the scramble. Then the cannon act had its round. The two human missiles slid into the barrel, a short wait followed by a deafening roar. Another interim, but nothing happened. After many tense moments and muffled conversation between the Zachinnis the barrel was lowered very slowly with the human bullets finally climbing out of the mouth of the giant cannon.

On another occasion Frankie Saluto was handling the reins of two donkeys pulling a small hook and ladder enroute to the fire house gag when he slid off the seat of the wagon and down inside the traces. Poor Frankie was wearing a paper mache Mickey Mouse head which reversed itself on his head when he fell making matters completely out of control until he was rescued.

I was watching Walter Guice doing his clown riding bit one afternoon with the ever popular hat tossing sequence. Of course the hat always had a thin wire attached to the crown so that when it was scaled to the opposite side of the ring Walter and horse were there to receive it. Somehow the wire became disconnected and hung limply in space. However Walter made the throw as usual and Minchin who is

Col. Tim McCoy is pictured in the backyard of the Ringling-Barnum Circus in 1935. The backdoor canopy is behind him. Pfening Collection.



The author is shown on the left in this 1935 photo. Mike Butch (Pop Eye) is holding Baron Pucci, Bill Gardner side show ticket taker is on the right.

now in his nineties and past President of the Felix Adler Tent, C.F.A. made frequent visits to the show no matt Madison Sq. Garden date. The Garden only allowed a few of the circus ushers to work with their regular staff. We only made 10% on the sales, so we grabbed all the programs left behind in the seats and resold them. The Boston Garden used more of the show ushers and this time I made the list. I worked a section of the balcony and when there was standing room only I sold sitting room on the steps, blocking the aisles to a degree where the candy butchers would raise all kinds of hell with the chief usher. He would settle their beef



but after each show one of his aides would circle the Garden and collect a donation from each usher. Tips were not uncommon in the Gardens, but were few and far between under canvas. Dusting a seat off with a rag often garnered a tip. Oscar Decker sent me a telegram at the N.Y. Garden offering me a lithographers job with Eddy Bros. which I turned down.

Although I never went into the side show on the road, I had a sudden urge to become a talker for Clyde Ingalls. So after a brief interview he said he would think it over. After waiting for about a week I figured it was down the drain. Then on a Saturday stand at Atlantic City he sent for me just as doors opened for the night show. So in my usher uniform I rushed over to the midway. Clyde spotted me and motioned me to get up on the bally platform. Arthur Wright's minstrel band was on tap. It's all yours said Clyde, make an opening. Having witnessed a few previous pitches helped me establish a pattern. So with a brief description of the wonders on the banner line and a gesture toward the ticket boxes I stole some of Clyde's thunder and said let the lights dazzle, the band play and the lions roar. The tip was turned and I awaited Clyde's response. O.K. Woody you start in Philly on Monday at twenty five per week and your own berth on Portland car 95.

Harry Lewiston was the assistant manager and a lot of friction existed between he and Clyde. Harry's wife Rose ran a mitt camp on the side show. One of my duties entailed picking up

Clicko, the African bushman, considered himself the manager of the Greatest Show on Earth, and was humored by show personnel. He is shown here in 1935. Joe Heiser Photo.



MILWAUKEE—2 DAYS Afternoon and Night

LAKE FRONT SHOW GROUNDS

TODAY and TOMORROW

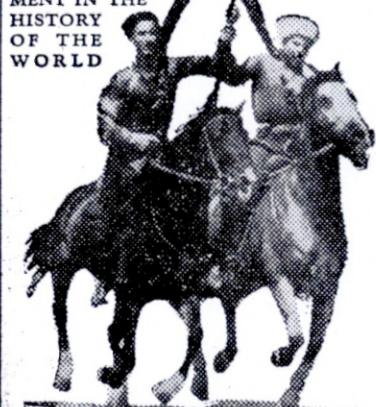
Auto Parking Foot of Erie St.

THE GREATEST SHOW ON EARTH

RINGLING BROS and BARNUM & BAILEY COMBINED CIRCUS

ALL NEW THIS YEAR

THE MOST GIGANTIC EXHIBITION OF MAMMOTH ENTERTAINMENT IN THE HISTORY OF THE WORLD



10,000 MARVELS—1600 PEOPLE—800 ARENIC CHAMPIONS—150 CLOWNS—750 HORSES—1000 MENAGERIE ANIMALS—7 HERDS OF ELEPHANTS—WORLD'S LARGEST TENT—7 RINGS & STAGES—HUGE HIPPODROME COURSE—4 TRAINS of Double-Length Steel RAILROAD CARS LOADED WITH WONDERS FROM EVERY LAND

**Twice Daily • 2 & 8 P.M. POPULAR PRICES
INTERVAL OPEN 1 & 7 P.M.**

This newspaper ad was used for the Milwaukee date in 1935. Kasiska Collection.

the cash from Lewiston, Pop Warner and Jim McSorley. Clyde was more concerned with Lewiston's ticket sales than anyone else. If Harry showed more of a take than Clyde storm clouds would hover overhead. I usually worked out of Clyde's box when he took



Clyde Ingalls, one of the greatest side show managers of all time, is shown with Daisy Doll on the Ringling Barnum show. Pfening Collection.

off and worked in the box with him for instruction. All of us including Clyde took walk away money but returned it if there was any squawk. Harry was also a money lender and wanted to set me up providing I returned the following season. Clyde was a heavy drinker and always kept a bottle in the ticket box. However he did handle himself very well under most circumstances. Bert the car porter used to come under fire quite frequently for tampering with Clyde's private stock and refilling the depleted bottles with water. Mrs. Ingalls was employed as a snake enchantress.

Among visitors to the lot were Lily Pons and Walter L. Main. I asked Walter if he could place me on his show as I was becoming a little uncertain about my future with Clyde. Walter advised me to stay put as the pastures weren't any greener out there. One of the most laughable incidents took place when Mrs. Charlie approached Clyde one day and reprimanded him for allowing his men to exaggerate the size of the orangoutang in the side show. Ringling Bros. would not tolerate misrepresentation in any manner shape or form even though Sam Gumpertz was now at the helm. As soon as she walked away Clyde sent me into the menagerie for a complete inventory of all the inhabitants. The next visit Mrs. Charlie made had Clyde ready and waiting. He asked her if she knew how many animals were in the menagerie and she admitted she had no idea, Clyde informed her there were less than half the amount that were advertised in paper and that his men were only guilty of verbal description and not advertising the surplus adjectives in black and white like the press

department. That ended the censorship.

Clicko the African Bushman gave Austin King the inside lecturer many a headache. He would ramble off the lot and head for the nearest pub whenever he wasn't watched. Then a big top jig would be dispatched to retrieve him. King said after one of these bouts Clicko was lifted back up on his platform and as Austin extended his arm to introduce inebriated pygmy, Clicko fell off the back of the platform. Candy Shelton who also ushered told me he was the one who discovered Eko and Iko the men from Mars. They believed the lecturer's spiel about not being able to see very well in broad daylight but were nocturnal creatures whose vision improved with darkness. Eko spoke up at one point when this was again mentioned by the lecturer and accused him of being a damn liar as Iko had tripped and fell into a mud hole the night before. Clyde gave me the ax shortly before we played Indianapolis where Tommy Pence came on and replaced me. Carl Hathaway reinstated me as an usher where I remained until the show reached Chicago. Here I left and drove back east with Joe and Alfredo Yacopi. I do not recall if the rest of the troupe dissolved there or not.

I forgot to mention that during the early part of the tour Washington, D.C. provided the back drop for a tragic incident. A sudden wind and rain storm broke during the matinee and the quarter poles started dancing. As the wind velocity increased one of the quarter poles broke in half and the jagged end of the top half swung into the reserved seats killing a little girl. A mass of humanity raced for safety as the big top sagged, but the storm ended almost as suddenly as it had started.

So back in New York again I went to work for Minsky's Burlesque on 42nd St. as a barker in front of the theatre.



The Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Combined Shows set up inside Soldier's Field in Chicago in 1935. Kasiska Collection.

Much to my surprise one day a Rolls Royce pulled up to the curb and who should step out but Mr. John Ringling. I followed him inside and told him I had just left the Big One. After a short conversation he asked me what they were doing with his show. He then said that Minsky had the best damn show in the city for a quarter. John Ringling died at Englewood Hospital in '36 and was buried in the Hackensack, N.J. cemetery. His remains were removed for non payment of the plot according to newspaper account in the *Bergen Evening Record* and brought to a mausoleum in Fairview just north of Jersey City. Whatever happened after that I do not know. He also owned an estate at Alpine, N.J.

Polidor (Edward Guillaume) the clown poses with Kathie Wilkmir in a 1930's photo. Pfening Collection.



I also went back over to New Jersey and managed a movie house for a while. During the early 60's Gijon Polidor the clown lived in a town right next to mine. I found out thru my son who was working for hay grain and feed store. Polidor had a horse there and told my boy that he was a circus man. So I went to see Polidor and he introduced me to his lady friend and her mother. We exchanged a few visits and Polidor related a funny prank he had played on Ella Bradna while she was doing her act beautiful with the colored pigeons. The pigeons were hoisted to the top of the Garden in a box and then released and after a short flight settled on Ella's outstretched arms. A white horse with wings pulling a chariot and white dogs walking in and out the spokes completed the picture. Polidor decided to add another dimension to the number. He went out and purchased a large fish at the market and left it hibernate for a few days until it was in a state of real decay. Then when the coast was clear he slipped it into the box with the captive birds. On cue the birds were released and the fish plopped at Ella's feet squirting bits of putrefied flesh on her white gown. Fred her husband who was standing close by burst out laughing. Polidor said you should have seen Ella tear into poor Fred cursing him out from A to Z. One time I offered to take Polidor to the Mills Bros. Circus where his old friend Herman Joseph was with it. He seemed very depressed and no coaxing on my part could induce him to go with me. So I went alone and the next day the newspaper headlines told the gruesome tale "Berserk Clown Murders Girlfriend". The judge who sentenced him was Italian and romanticized the role of Pagliacci as being inherent in a clown with a broken heart.

I give my thanks to Frank Mara of Jersey City and Fred Pfening for help in finalizing this account.

THE CIRCUS COLLECTION OF THE SAN ANTONIO PUBLIC LIBRARY

by Fred D. Pfening, III and Stuart Thayer

Around 1923 Harry Hertzberg (1884-1940), attorney, art patron, and indefatigable collector discovered a new passion, that of circus material. Over the next seventeen years he amassed a great amount of it which upon his death was willed to the San Antonio Public Library. While his holdings were outstanding in his own day and ours, by no stretch of the imagination did he collect everything worth collecting as he apparently boasted to his fellow circus fans.

Hertzberg appears to have been a less aggressive collector than generally believed. A number of other enthusiasts, notably Burt Wilson and John Grace, built collections almost on the same level during Hertzberg's lifetime, and in certain areas surpassed him. Today at least one public and two private collections are larger. Nevertheless, his collection is one of the finest ever assembled, and in some areas has no peer.

Examination of the collection and documents relating to it, reveals his material came from three main sources, although like any collector much was acquired piece by piece. In 1930 he purchased for \$500.00 much of the Arthur Chumley collection, which

in turn came to Chumley from the legendary Billy Allee, the pioneer circusiana collector. (For a delightful biography of Allee, see C.G. Sturtevant, "He Looked Like Sanger," in *White Tops*, December 1942-January 1943, pp. 7-8, 17.) This acquisition included hundreds of heralds, couriers, programs, auction lists, animal booklets and the like from the 1860's to the 1890's. From Townsend Walsh, a Ringling-Barnum press agent and theatrical writer, Hertzberg acquired perhaps a dozen fabulous scrapbooks which contain clippings, newspaper ads, programs, handbills, and even half sheet lithographs from 1809 to the 1890's. They are a feast for the researcher, and we heartily endorse Col. Sturtevant's 1930 judgment that Walsh had a "collection unapproachable in a number of particulars." The final major source, mostly posters of the 1870's and 1880's, was the material purchased from P.M.

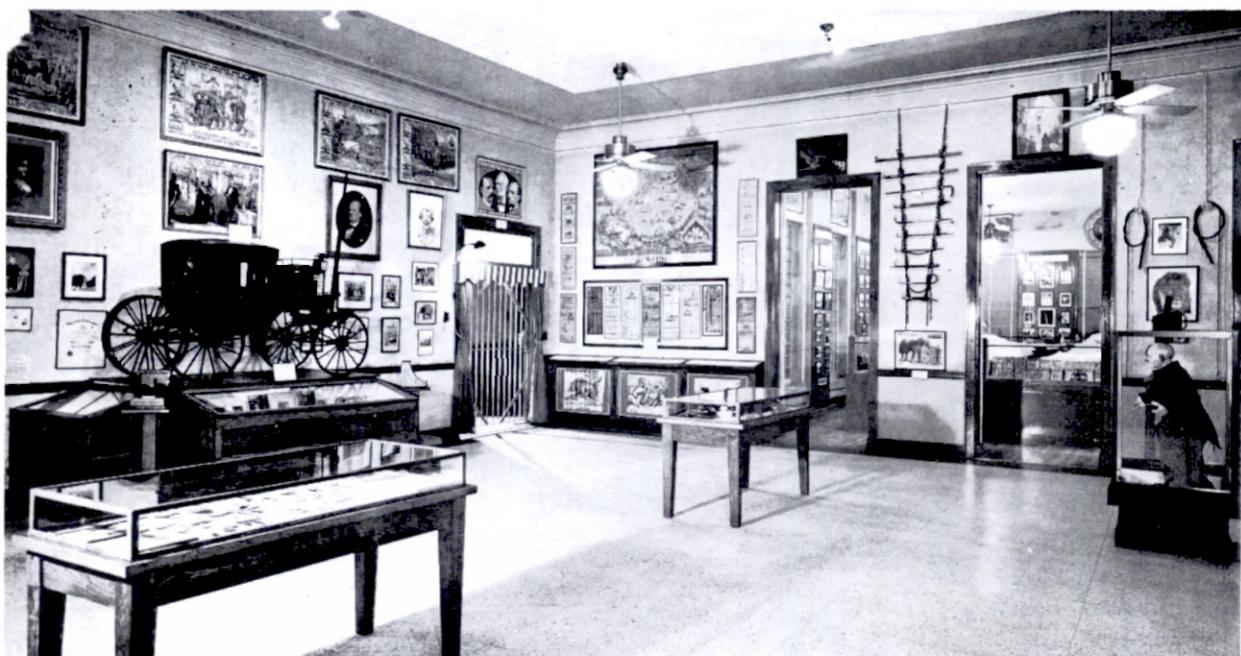
This photograph from the 1943 guidebook to the Hertzberg collection shows many of the fine posters he had acquired. The Tom Thumb coach is on the left. The collection is today displayed differently.

McClintock in the late 1930's. Had any one of these three sold their holdings elsewhere, this collection would be considerably less significant.

Its strongest point is 19th century handbills, of which there are an estimated 500. Perhaps a hundred are before the Civil War, but the majority are from the 1870's and 1880's including dozens of rat bills from the wonderfully acid pen of Charles H. Day. Most of these bills are in the aforementioned Walsh scrapbooks. It is possibly the finest herald collection in the world.

The lithograph collection also has many rare 19th century examples. A fantastic 1835 Zoological Institute three sheet is the highlight, although the most spectacular is an 1880 Cooper and Bailey multi-sheet tracing the show's route to Australia and South America. An important set of Barnum parade bills in the early 1880's is here, as are many fine Ringling bills printed by the Courier Company of Buffalo, New York. While not approaching the depth of the Circus World Museum's lithograph collection, it does have many unique examples of the art.

The programs, couriers, songsters, advertising and animal booklets are



not as overwhelming as the handbills, although there are numerous early and rare copies. Likewise, the route book collection is not outstanding. While any number of current collectors and institutions have larger holdings, the collection does have many precious editions, including the 1835 Zoological Institute book. For a complete list of the library's route books see, Richard E. Conover, "Locations of Primary Source of Material for Research on Circus History," *Bandwagon*, May-June, 1958, pp. 9-11.

The library also has bound volumes of the *New York Clipper* from the 1880's to the 1900's, and scattered issues in the 1860's and 1870's, and the *Billboard* is well represented after 1908, although access to original copies of these publications is of considerably less consequence since a nearly complete run of each was microfilmed in the 1960's.

Hertzberg was a bibliophile, as well as a circus fan, and built a library of some 6000 volumes of which 1500 are circus related. These include most of the rarer American books, such as Glenroy, as well as many early English and European volumes.

Hertzberg's obvious interest was circus advertising, and as a result the collection has few photographs, letterheads, documents, or manuscripts. But even here there are some gems. Important documents include a boarding contract for Raymond & Co. in 1854, the bill of sale and complete inventory of the Al G. Barnes Circus when it was sold to the American Circus Corporation in 1929, and a routing agreement between the Barnum and Ringling shows in 1906, negotiated by W.W. Cole and John Ringling.

Other items merit special mention. Scrapbooks kept by W.C. Boyd and Charles H. Day deserve attention, particularly the ones assembled by Day because they include clippings of his column "Sawdust," from the *Sporting and Theatrical Journal* in the 1880's. Only a few copies of this rival to the *Clipper* are known to exist. Scrapbooks and memorabilia kept by Mrs. Tom Thumb are also in the collection, as are a number of non-circus items relating to P.T. Barnum and Jenny Lind. Especially useful to those interested in circus and lithographic art work are the perhaps 200 preliminary and final drawings by Emil Rothengatter, the famous 19th century poster artist and parade wagon designer who signed his work E. Roe.

While virtually all the library's primary material came from Hertzberg, it had another great benefactor in Homer DeGolyer (1893-1963), one time CFA national historian. During his later years DeGolyer commuted from Dallas at least once a week to do research at the library, and out of



Harry Hertzberg on the Ringling-Barnum lot for the 1934 Madison, Wisconsin, CFA convention. To his right holding the elephant is Faye Braathen, and to his left is Hugo Zacchini. Hertzberg

was an influential member of the CFA, serving as President of the organization from 1930 until 1932. His most enduring contribution was his founding of the famous Koo-Koo Klub.

this affiliation came three significant contributions to the collection.

DeGolyer's personal interest was the early American circus and he amassed a collection of abstracted advertisements which rest in three notebooks covering the period 1793 to 1840. While by no means a complete record, these notebooks have been of great value to other historians, and DeGolyer's memory could rest easy with just this contribution.

He also was responsible for the famous Dingess manuscript coming to the collection. John A. Dingess (1829-1901) was a 19th century advance man, who, upon retirement, settled into the New York Public Library to write a history of the circus. He was unable to publish it, and the manuscript eventually passed to one of his heirs, from whom DeGolyer purchased it for the Hertzberg collection. Reading it today, one can see why no publisher was interested in it. It has little cohesion and is largely anecdotal. Yet where the author wrote from personal knowledge it is worthwhile, and contains much detail unobtainable elsewhere.

The final coup, which DeGolyer accomplished by purchase from the late Tom Scaperlanda, was the manuscript of C.G. Sturtevant's voluminous work "Who's Who in the American Circus," which was partially serialized in *White Tops* in the early and mid 1960's. As anyone can testify who ever saw Sturtevant's handwriting, the editorial task which DeGolyer undertook was formidable. This work consists of lists of circus personnel, divided into various job classifications (i.e., performers, proprietors, advance men, etc.) with their show affiliation by year. It is a tremendous piece of

research, and while now outdated in some respects, is still the most ambitious work of its kind. Sturtevant also compiled a listing of circus titles in chronological order which is, unfortunately, filled with errors, especially in the earlier period, and cannot be considered in the same category as the work on personnel. DeGolyer's editorial decision not to annotate or correct errors in the original manuscript has had the deleterious effect of perpetuating misinformation.

The DeGolyer gifts also include a very detailed archive dealing with the history of the Circus Fans Association. The library's vertical files contain a file folder for each year of the CFA's existence with clippings, notes and convention programs. He apparently was working on a history of the organization at the time of his death.

The exhibition rooms contain photographs, lithographs, framed heralds and the like, as well as such three dimensional memorabilia as the Gentry ticket wagon, a Tom Thumb coach, bull hooks, uniforms, and Harry Thomas' miniature circus. To a member of the general public these exhibits present a fairly well-rounded history of the American circus, although some displays, such as the one of Jenny Lind, are misleading.

Several very rare items are on display, such as a 1793 Ricketts handbill (the oldest American one in existence), a fine portrait of Richard Sands, and many fine, fine posters. Of special note is a great photograph of the Barnum show lot in 1879.

On the second floor is what appears to be the contents of Tom Scaperlanda's circus room from his dwelling. It consists of a number of photographs—



mostly publicity shots of performers and of CFA gatherings—and a great many china and plaster clowns and dime store animals. The significance or historical value of this grouping escaped us. Certainly the space could be better utilized by exhibiting more of Hertzberg's material.

On a recent visit we found the present librarian Betty King courteous and helpful in pointing out items we might find interesting. A library professional with no compelling interest in the circus before her assignment at the Hertzberg, she has done her homework and is knowledgeable not only in the collection she supervises, but in circus history in general. She is, alas, the only full-time employee and as a result her time to a large extent is taken up with the visiting public. She cannot do research for correspondents except in a cursory manner. The best way to use the material is to visit San Antonio.

It is unfortunate that funding is not available to more fully staff and more vigorously preserve the collection's treasures. It saddens the researcher to see one of the earliest known American handbills (Pepin and Breschard, 1809) pasted upon the acidic page of a twenty-five cent scrapbook. Hertzberg obviously did not organize or catalogue his material to any extent, nor did he take particular care in preserving it, and while Ms. King tries to maintain the collection, she has neither the time nor the money to care for it in the manner it deserves. The result has been a slow but steady deterioration—a tear here, a flaking off there—over the years. This problem is compounded by the lack of an adequate card catalogue which forces the researcher to go through the material piece by piece to access its holdings. The great handbill collection is largely uncatalogued, although check lists exist for parts of it. But one would never know, for example, that the Walsh scrapbooks contain over a hundred

Col. C.G. Sturtevant on the lot of the Barnes show in 1931. Sturtevant was one of the first circus fans to correspond with and interview old troupers about their experiences on circuses of the past. He did much of his research at the Hertzberg collection after 1942.

early 19th century English circus bills unless he went through each brittle page of his scrapbooks.

The villain here is changing times. The San Antonio library system has a limited amount of funds, and even the most ardent circus fan must concede that supporting a large oddball collection that doesn't create a penny of revenue shouldn't be high on the library board's priorities. Yet this is the second best public collection in the country, the best in some important areas, and one wishes and hopes some miracle will occur and funds will materialize to better maintain its wonders. In this new age of austerity that prospect seems unlikely. We should be thankful that the powers that be have seen fit to maintain the collection in a separate building and allow one full time staff person.

Hertzberg left a small trust fund in his estate for acquisitions and maintenance of the material, but inflation has made this endowment meaningless. In 1957, a new head city librarian considered giving the collection to the Witte Memorial Museum, but the idea was abandoned, in part because of an outcry from the CFA (see Herman Linden, "Hertzberg Collection in Danger of Being Broken Up," *White Tops*, January-February, 1958, p. 3). The fans' attack may well have been short sighted as the material presumably would have been better preserved elsewhere. As it stands now the white elephant that forlornly trumpets in front of the building that houses this magnificent collection symbolizes its status to the San Antonio library system.



Billy Allee

Billy Allee, the first great collector of circus material. From the 1860's until his death in 1926 he collected all the advertising materials from every show that played his home town of St. Joseph, Missouri. Harry Hertzberg acquired much of his collection after his death from Arthur Chumley, an early CFA.

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Johnnie Schmidt

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Cole Bros. Winterquarters, Louisville, Ky.

Photo Supplement

by Joseph T. Bradbury

The state fairgrounds in Louisville, Ky was the winter home of Cole Bros. Circus for nine years. Following the February 1940 fire which destroyed the show's Rochester, Indiana quarters it was necessary to secure a new location. Zack Terrell, the Cole Bros. owner, secured use of the Louisville fairgrounds and upon conclusion of the 1940 season the show went there to winter. Under the new ownership of Jack Taylin and associates the show departed Louisville for the last time in the spring of 1949 and went into new quarters in Ojus, Florida, near Miami, when the season was concluded.

During the current series of articles covering the history of Cole Bros. Circus 1941-50 we have run photo supplements of the Louisville quarters. As mentioned before no major article will be printed since CHS member Bill Rhodes covered the quarters so completely in his splendid articles printed in the Sept-Oct 1975 and Nov-Dec 1975 issues of *The White Tops*. (For readers not familiar with Rhodes' articles back copies can be obtained from the editor of *The White Tops*.) At our specific request, Bill Rhodes, who lived in Louisville during the time Cole Bros. wintered there and still does, has furnished us with information concerning the disposition of the several Cole Bros. wagons left there when the show departed in early 1949 and also the final fate of the quarters itself.

Rhodes says he specifically remembers two former cookhouse wagons which had no wheels or undercarriage and could not be moved readily sitting around the quarters when the show departed in 1949. Photos printed here show there were several other wagons in similar condition. These just faded away, victims of weather and vandalism. There were a number of wagons left in Louisville that were useable. Some of these had formerly been used to load seats and were replaced by the new wagons delivered by Kentucky Trailer Co. in the early spring of 1949. Others, of course, had served in different capacities in the past. Rhodes estimates that 8 or 9 of these wagons were moved to Zack Terrell's farm near Owensboro, Ky. shortly after Cole Bros. dis-



Photo No. 2—Rail sidings at Cole Bros. Louisville quarters, early 1949. At left is a flat and string of coaches and at right five stock cars. Note second flat from top has

letterboard in different color scheme. It was not carried in 1948 as were the other four. The show had 5 stocks in 1947, cut down to 4 in 1948, and to 3 in 1949.



Photo No. 6—Louisville quarters, early 1949. At left is No. 30 and at right are No. 2 Mack truck, now retired, and former baggage wagon used for storage.

continued use of the Louisville quarters. From Owensboro one wagon was later given away and the rest remained there past 1970 and

Photo No. 1—Louisville quarters, early 1949, picturing No. 100, train light dept. wagon in center foreground and two wagons without wheels and gears used for storage purposes. Note top of flat car at extreme left to be redecked. All photos were taken by Harold Gorsuch.



were finally dragged out into a field and burned since they were not maintainable. None are there now.

As for the quarters in Louisville, Rhodes advises, that the old fairgrounds was later sold to a horse racing organization. They enlarged the track, extending the oval northward thru the former quarters. The rail sidings and all buildings constructed by Cole were destroyed in this process. The grandstand which was the paint shop was destroyed about two years ago (1978) to make way for a new stand. The poultry and rabbit building which was the original animal barn and zoo is still there and used by the local Caterpillar dealer and can be seen from Interstate 264. Rhodes says he knows of no Cole wagons remaining in the Louisville area now (1980).

When the Cole train left in the spring of 1949 the two pony floats, Old Woman in Shoe and Mother Goose, and the sea lion den were not carried. By some unknown route they later rejoined the show, or at least remained its property, but it appears the wagons were not actively used again. The final disposition of the two floats and sea lion den and their current location will be discussed in a later article.

This fine set of photos printed here were taken by Harold Gorsuch in the Louisville quarters in the early months of 1949, a short time before the show left Louisville forever.



Photo No. 3—No. 64 wagon parked at Louisville quarters. It was used for the sideshow fighting lion act which was on the show for several seasons in the late 1940's but was not carried in 1949.



Photo No. 4—Cole Bros. quarters, Louisville, Ky., early spring 1949. In center foreground is site used for making tent stakes. Also note baggage wagon in top

center which has recently been painted orange, new color scheme for 1949. At top right is one of the new seat wagons just delivered by Kentucky Trailer Co.



Photo No. 5—Baggage wagons parked at the Louisville quarters. At left are four wagons with the 1948 color scheme and at right is one recently painted with the new orange color.



Photo No. 7—Louisville quarters, early spring 1949. In foreground is the show's private car recently repainted and renamed, Saratoga Springs. Note corner of the fairground grandstand at right.



Photo No. 8—Baggage wagons parked at Cole Bros. quarters, Louisville, Ky. early 1949. Note Columbia tableau which was used as grandstand ticket wagon.



Photo No. 9—Cole Bros. wagons parked at Louisville quarters. Pony floats, Mother Goose and Old Woman in Shoe did not go on road with the show in 1949.



Photo No. 10—Cole Bros. wagons parked at Louisville quarters, early 1949. Note in foreground fence built from seat stringers.



Photo No. 11—Cole Bros. wagons parked at Louisville quarters, early 1949. Note Columbia tableau in center foreground.



Photo No. 12—Cole Bros. Louisville quarters, early 1949. In foreground are No. 86 and No. 71, retired baggage wagons. At right are No. 86, new wagon which replaced the older one, and No. 73. Note that new canvas purchased for the 1949 season has been erected.



Photo No. 13—Cole Bros. wagons parked at Louisville quarters, early 1949. In center are two stringer wagons, flanked on right by two small chariots, and on left, pony floats, Mother Goose and Old Woman in Shoe.



Photo No. 15—Cole Bros. baggage wagons parked at Louisville quarters, early 1949.



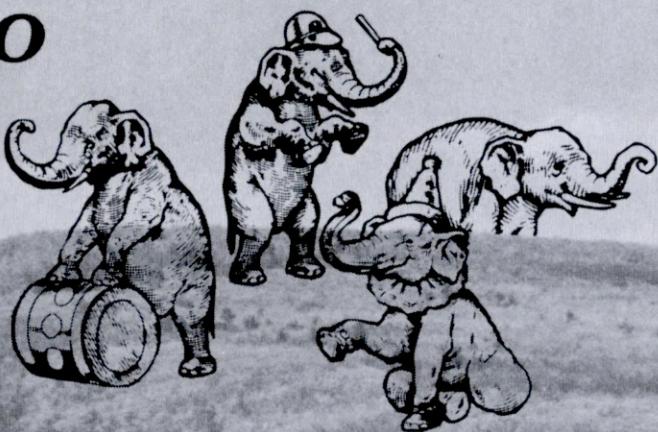
Photo No. 16—Cole Bros. baggage wagons parked at Louisville quarters, early 1949.

BILL KASISKA'S CIRCUS LETTERHEADS



The Bill Kasiska circus letterhead collection contained a large number of very rare examples. The one shown here was used by The Great Forepaugh Show in 1877. It is printed in black ink. This letter was written to the Strobridge Lithograph Co., and speaks of receiving only 892 sheets of paper on an order of 1000 sheets. It is written and signed by Adam A. Forepaugh. Forepaugh operated his show from 1866 until his death in 1890.

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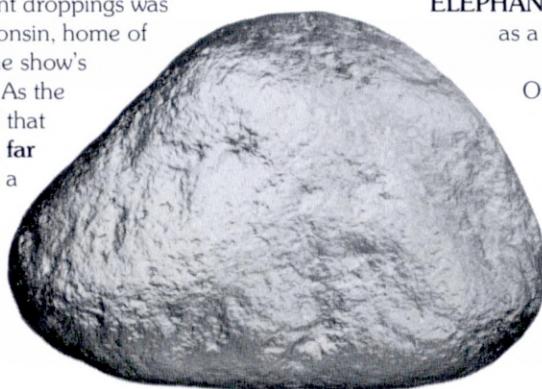
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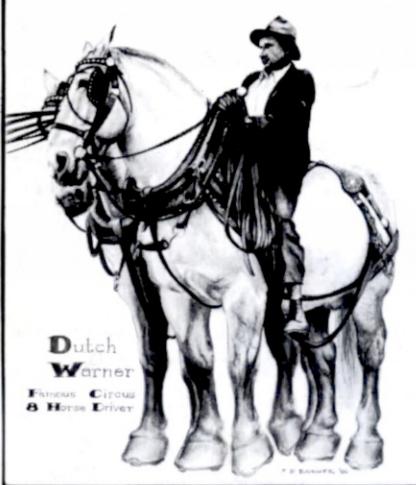
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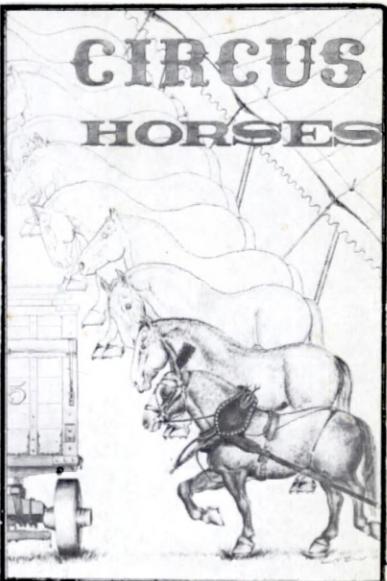


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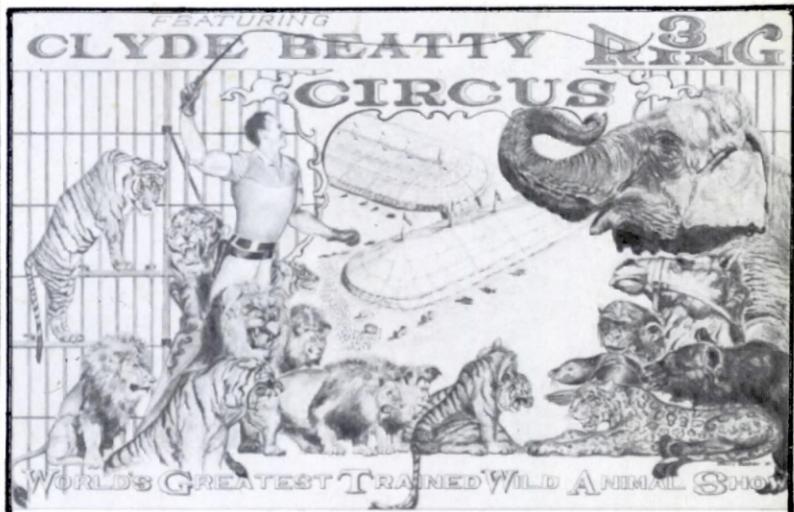
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